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## Riders of the Hidden Trail

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF AN EVENTFUL  
NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF THOMAS KANE, FORMERLY  
DEPUTY SHERIFF

By Charles Wesley Sanders

THOMAS KANE, late deputy sheriff, sat on the porch of his new bungalow, completed two months ago, and regarded nature in her sunny mood.

It was high noon, and the Oklahoma sun was blazing overhead; but Thomas Kane was not suffering from the heat. Five feet from him an electric fan revolved with a whirring, soothing sound. On a nearer table was a pitcher of lemonade. The pitcher was half full of ice, and its sides were temptingly frosted. In Kane's mouth was a long cigar, purchased at a cost of fifty cents. His feet were on the rail of the porch. He was comfortably slumped down in a chair which had a thick cushion on back and seat, and which was further equipped with heavy steel springs.

Clambering up the porch on all sides were red roses in full bloom. Their fragrance came pleasingly to Kane's nostrils. He was enjoying a fine rest.

Up to a year ago Kane had led a hard life. As deputy sheriff, he had had to poke his nose into countless dangerous places. He carried a number of scars to remind him of occasions when he and death had cast the dice to see who could make his point first. Then Mr. Kane had made money in oil, as so many other people were doing in Oklahoma, and he turned in his badge and retired, to take his ease with his beautiful young wife.

After the acquisition of his tidy wad of bank notes, Kane had had one of the prettiest romances that a man could hope for, surpassing his dreams by at least a hundred per cent. A moment more, and that romance can be touched upon, explanation being necessary in order to make the situation clear.

Here we must pause to listen, with Kane, to the ringing of the telephone in the living room. At the same instant we catch

the sound of Mrs. Kane's footsteps descending the stairs. Comes her voice—soft, sweet music to the ears of Kane.

"Never mind, honey!" she called. "Don't stir! I'm right here. I'll answer the phone."

Kane settled back with a grunt of contentment and took a long, hard pull on his cigar. It seemed as if his wife was always right there when anything was needed. It seemed as if she lay in wait to do things like this, so that the comfort of her beloved husband should know no interruption.

Not that Kane wished her to wait on him. First and last, he took more steps for her than she took for him. Between them, things flowed on an easy current in the Kane home. Kane always thought she was doing more for him than he for her, and she thought otherwise; and so there was no dispute about it.

Now, Bessie Kane had a profound appreciation of the ease and comfort and pleasure with which Kane had surrounded her. Like so many American girls, she had been swift to adapt herself to a new environment. Her manners were those of a lady. This was not exactly a new development, for she had always known what good manners were; but heretofore she had had little occasion to use them, and sometimes she had been too tired to do so. A weary round from hall bedroom to uninteresting place of employment will blunt the social graces of even the most fastidious; but what was instinctive with Bessie flowered in her new surroundings, as the roses flower in that sun-bathed land.

When she took down the receiver, she didn't say "Hello," leaving the person at the other end of the wire to inquire whether he had got the right number. In her smooth, even, dulcet voice she said:

"Thomas Kane's residence."

There the caller-up was, all connected and informed, so that he could shoot right along with his talk.

Apparently the present caller-up was a person of exceedingly few words, for an instant after she had made her announcement she set the receiver on the little phone table and came to the screen door.

"Somebody wants you, honey," she said. "Sorry to disturb you."

"Yes, it's a terrible thing!" said Thomas Kane, a humorous smile twisting his lips. "I'm so feeble that I dunno if I can get to that phone!"

He laid a hand on his wife's shoulder as he passed through the door, and they smiled confidently into each other's eyes. They were much to each other, these two, for both of them had come out of the shadows of life into the sunshine, and they were naturally appreciative. They believed in each other as thoroughly as man or woman ever believed in anything in a world full of sound and fury.

Kane walked over to the phone and picked it up. His wife listened, for no secrets lay between them.

She gathered little from what Kane said. His conversation was limited to exactly five "yehs," briskly spoken. Then he said:

"I'll be right on the job, old boy!" He hung up the receiver. "Just a minute, Bessie," he added, turning to his wife.

He swept to the stairs and bounded up them, two steps at a time. Bessie's big brown eyes followed him till he disappeared. She heard him move across an upper room and open a dresser drawer. The dresser was new, and that top drawer always squeaked a little.

Dread came into the heart of Thomas Kane's wife. It had been born there because of two things. One was the look in her husband's eyes as he put down the phone. The soft, lazy look had suddenly died in them, and they flashed with a hard brilliance.

The other thing was the fact that he had called her Bessie. She couldn't remember that he had done that since they were married, except in the presence of others. He always "honeyed" her and "deared" her in a fashion that might have made cynical people laugh.

Bessie's alarm became actual terror as Kane returned down the stairs. He was putting on his gun belt. It was heavily laden with cartridges, and there was a six-shooter in each holster. The holsters had open tops, and the butts of the big guns protruded with ugly significance.

The flashing brilliance had died out of his eyes, and they were set, cold, determined. Bessie had never seen that look in them before. Her husband had told her many tales of the dangers he had passed—he and other men—and she had shivered and been grateful that he had to face such perils no more. She knew, instantly, that amid those dangers his face had had the look that it had now.



His nostrils—which were large even in repose—were a little dilated. His wide mouth was locked till lips ordinarily rather full were a mere line. His red blood burned under his tan—which his face had kept because he still spent many hours in the sun, riding about the country with his wife.

Bessie backed to a table, put her hands behind her, and rested her palms on the table top. Her bosom was rising and falling swiftly. Her eyes were wide as she stared at her husband.

Kane finished fastening his belt. He raised his eyes to his wife's face, and they grew suddenly gentle. He crossed over to her.

"Honey," he said, taking her hands, and finding them cold, "I've got to leave you for a while. I've got to ride out and meet the sheriff and a posse, and give them a hand in catching a man who has escaped from the penitentiary. He got away night before last, when it stormed so hard, and the lights went out. He sneaked away right under the guards in their towers, and they couldn't see him. I won't be gone long, honey."

He leaned to kiss her. For the first time since their initial kiss, when Kane had asked her to marry him, she drew back.

"Who is the man?" she whispered.

"Fellow named Shartel, so the sheriff says," Kane answered.

"What was he in the penitentiary for?" Bessie asked.

Heretofore Kane had delighted in his wife's penetration. He had called her "the knowingest woman in the world." Sometimes she seemed able to guess his thoughts before he put them into words. She couldn't have asked a more disquieting question just now, however.

"Oh, he'd been sent up for something or other," Kane evaded.

"For what?"

"Well, it was for murder, Bessie. He was doing a life term."

"Who was it he killed?"

"It was three years ago," Kane sighed. "He had been drinking bad liquor, and he killed a woman and—a little girl. He went riding down the road in a rag town, and just shot two innocent folks to death. He had served a term for robbery, and had been up on a murder charge before, but got free somehow. He's no good. Can't be allowed to be at large. Might shoot anybody. The only way to stop him is for

us fellows to comb the countryside and nab him."

"How does the sheriff know he's in this country?" she asked.

"He was seen getting off a freight train two miles east. Fellows that saw him had been at his trial. They were afraid to tackle him, because he'd stolen a couple of guns some place, and they were unarmed. This morning, just before dawn, he stole a horse and made for the hills. He's hiding in them some place now."

"You men will go into the hills and hunt him," said Bessie. "You'll be separated. You'll never think of the risk, Tom. You may come on him in hiding, and he may fire on you before you—"

Her voice trailed off. Kane managed to laugh.

"Why, honey," he said, "I've been through this business a hundred times, and I've lived to be blessed by having you for a wife. There's no real danger. Honest, I don't want to brag, but there isn't an outlaw in this State that can get me, when once I pick up his trail. I'll be careful. I must go, honey. The sheriff and the boys are waiting over at Joe Dawson's, and they won't wait long. If I don't show up in half an hour, they will take to the hills without me. The sheriff picks his men, and it's an honor to be picked. He won't wait for any man, though."

"You say there's no danger," Bessie said dully. "You say that, after what you've told me about man hunts in the past. There was the time when a bullet went through your hat and clipped your hair. There is that scar where a bullet plowed across your chest. If you had been facing the other way, you would have been shot through the heart. And there were other times as perilous as those; yet you tell me that there is no danger!"

"Well, I'll take that back," Kane said slowly. "Shouldn't have said it. Course there's danger—plenty of it. If I have to say it myself, that's why the sheriff called on me and some of the other boys. He knows my ways. He knows he can always depend on me."

"He knows that you will go into places where few men would care to go," Bessie said. "He knows that you will not think of the danger to yourself. He knows that if you have to risk your life to get this killer, you will do it. That's why he has called you!"

"All the other boys he has collected will be ready to do the same thing," Kane said. "They're all game, they can shoot, and they won't think of anything but getting this fellow locked up again. He's a danger to the community, Bessie."

"The sheriff and his posse will undoubtedly get the man," Bessie said. "They will have just that one idea; but—but the chances are very good that before night some members of that posse will be carried out of the hills, and will never hunt a man again. Isn't that true?"

Kane looked deeply into the eyes of his wife. The thing she described might happen to him. She might never see him alive again. That would be a terrible thing for her. He couldn't leave her with a lie on his lips, even if the lie was designed to give her temporary peace.

"Why, yes—I reckon that's true, Bessie," he said.

She drew her hands from his clasp and put them on his shoulders. Her long fingers dug into his flesh beneath his shirt. The eyes of his beloved wife entreated him.

"You're not going!" she said. "I can't stand it! If anything should happen to you, I'd—I'd—I don't know what I'd do. We've been so happy here, and it's the first real happiness for either of us. You've done your duty by the community in the past. You've risked your life again and again. Let some one else take your place this time—just this time! I can't bear it, Tom! I can't bear to have our happiness broken up. You can call me a coward if you want to, and I know I am a coward; but you mustn't go on this man hunt. You simply mustn't!"

Kane opened his lips to speak, but before he could command tardy words his wife circled his neck with her arms and laid her head on his breast. Sobs shook her. Kane would not have suffered more keenly if some one had thrust a knife into his heart and twisted it there.

"Honey, honey!" he whispered. "Don't do that! I can't stand that!"

The storm of her sobbing only increased in violence. Kane unclasped her arms and put her away from him. She stood back against the table, her face uncovered, tears streaming down it.

"Don't cry," the former deputy entreated. "I'm not going. I'll let the other boys have a chance at this game. See, I'm taking off my belt, honey!"

He unfastened the belt, and, with the guns still in the holsters, laid it on the table.

"There!" he said. "That settles that. In a few minutes the sheriff will hit the hills without me. I guess he'll have enough help."

Kane's voice was low, and there was a listless sag to his shoulders. He half turned, so that his wife should not see his face. He felt as if his face had taken on an aged, haggard look. For the first time in his life he had heard the call and had failed to answer it.

His wife dabbed away her tears with her handkerchief, and fought for composure.

"I'll hurry lunch," she said. "I'll make it as nice as I can."

With face still averted, Kane walked to the door. The listless sag of his shoulders was emphasized.

"I guess I don't want any lunch," he said. "I'm not feeling up to food just now. I'll go out and visit with the horse, and see how he's getting along."

"You—you won't saddle him and ride away?" she questioned.

Kane swept his arm toward the table.

"There are my guns," he said. "A man doesn't ride on an errand like that unless he has his guns with him." He smiled a queer, crooked smile. "There will be men up in the hills presently," he said, "and there will be some shooting. They'll get that outlaw, those *men* will, even if they have to contribute some of their number; but I won't be there. No, I'll be safe in my snug nest, while men that have followed me in the past go out and attend to that little job!"

Still smiling his crooked smile, he opened the door and went out on the porch. Bessie heard him descend the steps. With bitterness in his heart he was leaving her to seek his horse, companion on many a dangerous ride.

Mrs. Thomas Kane wept no more. She rested her locked hands on the table in front of her, and stared at the wall with unseeing eyes.

"Coward!" she said at last, accusingly. "You're not fit to be his wife!"

She half rose, as if she would follow him and send him riding into the peril that the hills held. Then she dropped back into her seat and stared anew.

"I can't do it!" she whispered. "I can see him wounded, bleeding, dying, dead."

It would be too much. I couldn't possibly bear it!"

She twisted her interlocked fingers and stared and stared.

## II

BESSIE had worked as cashier in the so-called coffeeroom of a hotel in a big Eastern city. When Thomas Kane, for the first time in his life, found himself with money to spend, he went to that city to have a look-see. He had never been out of the Oklahoma county in which he had been born. Of course, he read the newspapers, and he knew that there were mammoth towns between his village and the Atlantic Ocean. He wanted to see one of those towns.

The big town did not bewilder him as much as one might have thought. Even in his own village there were automobiles a plenty, and a single street car line. Sometimes, on a Saturday night, a man would have to run across the street to get through the traffic safely. Crossing the city streets, therefore, did not bother Kane much. In fact, the traffic policemen made it easier to get across than it sometimes was back home.

The sidewalks were always crowded, but, for that matter, the village sidewalks were crowded on Saturday nights. It was no new sensation for Kane to edge his way through a crowd. The big town had theaters and movie houses in countless numbers; but the village had two, and Kane noticed familiar names on the signs in front of the city places. The hotel at which he stopped was no finer than the new hotel back home—a hotel built from oil money, which meant that it was built regardless of expense.

On the evening of his first day, Kane began to find the city rather monotonous. He wished that he was on the back of a good horse in the open country. A rush of wind would have perked him up. He didn't think the air in the city was especially good. It was heavy, and it had too much smoke in it. He began to think of returning home, though he had originally planned a ten-day vacation.

Then, the next morning, he saw Bessie. He hadn't noticed the coffeeroom tucked off the lobby of the hotel until he came down in the elevator, hungry as the proverbial bear. He reckoned he would try the coffeeroom.

Leaving his key at the desk, he walked through the door. He ate heartily, and looked around for a cigar stand, where he could replenish his supply of "makings." He didn't find the cigar stand—but he found Bessie.

Bessie was perched on a stool in front of the street window. She was behind a desk, and at her right hand was a cash register. Kane's eyesight was particularly good, and down the length of the room he viewed the girl. To him, she was a young goddess on a pedestal. He saw brown hair, brown eyes, a satiny skin, red lips, and a white throat above a white dress.

Thomas Kane picked up his check, took his hat off the hook, and went briskly the length of the room and up to the desk. He put a five-dollar bill on top of the check, and pushed check and bill toward the girl. She made his change without looking at him.

"Looks like it's going to be hot again to-day, ma'am," he said.

Perhaps there was a different quality in his voice. Anyhow, she looked at him. It cannot be doubted that a snappy retort rose to her lips, for every day she had to squelch would-be mashers. Perhaps there was something different in the looks of this man from the West. Anyhow, she did not utter the snappy retort. Her eyes ran over Kane's lean, brown, unsmiling face. Her color deepened just perceptibly.

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "It's going to be hot."

Thomas left the coffeeroom. He would be back for lunch, he knew; but before the hour of twelve he had twice returned to eat pie and drink coffee at the counter. Each time he paid his check he addressed a remark to Bessie, but he did not smile. Each time Bessie gave him a low, grave response, and searched his lean countenance. She found nothing but sincerity in it.

'Twas thus at noon. 'Twas thus at night; and then upspoke the Westerner.

"Would you care to go to a show with me to-night?" he said. "Any place you pick will suit me."

She made his change slowly. There was a little pucker between her eyes. She counted out the money with her eyes only on it. Then she looked out through the window.

"I'd rather go to a park, where it will be cool and quiet," she said.

"Why, that's fine!" replied Kane. "I thought perhaps a show would suit you better. If there's a big park lying around handy, that's the place for me. What time do you get through?"

"In five minutes."

"I'll be right outside," said Thomas.

He suggested a cab. He had seen a line of cabs at the side entrance. She appeared to debate the matter.

"We'll take a street car," she said.

In the park they found a bench. From the bench they could see the lake. A silver moon came up. Thomas told his name; she told hers. He told her where he came from; she said she had always lived in the city.

Thomas, bewitched, but keeping his head, bet his stack then. He told her about his horses. Like *Othello*, he related hair-raising adventures. He was all alone in the world, he said, and it was about time he settled down. He had four oil wells on his place, and was going to drill more. He would keep about ten acres on the corner, and build a bungalow. He would have a couple of cars, if anybody around the place wanted them. For himself, he preferred a horse. His income was about two hundred dollars a day just now.

Bessie coughed, and laughed a throaty, little laugh.

"It's a fine moon, isn't it?" she said.

Thomas had not the slightest interest in the moon. He was looking at her lifted profile, her square little chin, her wavy brown hair, the line of her smooth throat. Cupid, somewhere among the trees, never made a better shot. Thomas had been wounded when he looked at her in the restaurant; now he was shot plumb through the heart. He was lost to the world of bachelors, if he could persuade the lady.

"I'd like to have you for a partner," he said. "I'll take you back to my country and make a queen of you."

Bessie continued to look at the moon.

"I make fifteen dollars a week in the coffeeroom," she said. "I sleep in a room with one window in it. There is space for me, if I crowd myself, and for three pieces of furniture. I have to dress like a lady. I save three dollars a week. I have ninety-nine dollars in the bank now. This is the best job I ever had. I've had it thirty-three weeks. I think I had better keep it. Let's get a street car!"

She rose. Thomas Kane did not rise.

"You think I'm lying to you, don't you?" he asked.

"Well, a man with that income *might* wear a twenty-five-dollar suit right off the shelf and a fifty-cent necktie, ready made. Some people are peculiar. Let's go!"

"I've never been very strong on clothes," Kane said. "I just went into a store back home and bought this outfit I'm wearing. I can prove to you that what I've told you is true."

"If you have an income of two hundred dollars a day, you don't want to marry a working girl," she said. "You can go to Europe and pick yourself a princess."

"Sit down!"

That was the tone Thomas had often used when he had ordered a bad actor to "stick 'em up." The girl looked at him in astonishment. What did he mean, talking to her in that tone?

She saw a strange look in his eyes. It was such a straightforward look as the girl was not accustomed to. She sat down.

Kane had never known that there was eloquence in him, but now he seemed to tap a reserve supply somewhere. Bessie confessed afterward that his words thrilled her like an old song or a well remembered tale of high romance, but then she was not a competent witness.

"I'm not trying to bribe you, girl," said Kane, almost severely; "but I have lived close myself, and I know that a wad of money coming in is a mighty enjoyable thing. I wouldn't have spoken to you this way if I hadn't the money to make things easy and pleasant for you."

He paused, and his eyes followed hers to the moon. He wanted to say the three most potent words in any language, but, dog-gone it, it was hard to get them out! He had always considered that a man who talked like that had gone completely soft. However, he got out the words at last, and added thickly:

"Will you marry me, Bessie?"

She interlocked her fingers—a habit she had in times of stress. For a space she sat like a statue. Then she said, in a voice that trembled:

"How long are you going to be in town?"

"Till I get the proper answer from you."

That was an inspired statement. Bessie drew a long, slow breath.

"Take me home now," she said. "I'll see you to-morrow night."



He took her home, and stood with her in front of the brick house in which she had that uninviting room. Other houses leaned up close. The street was narrow, the air was thick, and there was no breeze.

"A pretty hard place to live," said Kane. "Let me take you out of it!"

He looked down at her, hat in hand. She searched his face for a long time. Then, suddenly, twin tears welled up in her brown eyes, hung there for a moment, and rolled out on her cheeks.

Thomas Kane clenched and unclenched his hands once. He reached out his arms.

Three days later he took Bessie back to Oklahoma with him. He set aside a small acreage, a little reservation upon which the drillers would never encroach. He bought two automobiles. He built a neat bungalow for a home. Apparently there wasn't a cloud in the sky of Thomas and Bessie Kane's happiness.

And now Bessie was sitting staring at the wall with unseeing eyes, and Thomas was out in the new barn. He was standing by a mare brought in out of the heat. He was fond of the mare. She was his favorite horse; but it was well enough that his wife did not hear the words that he addressed to the sleek animal. They were strong words, lacking elegance.

### III

THE new bungalow was a house of gloom that afternoon. Supper was a silent meal. Thomas Kane kept his eyes on his plate, and ate little. After a couple of apprehensive glances at her husband, Bessie dropped her own eyes. She ate even less than he did.

After supper Thomas went out on the porch and lighted one of his expensive cigars. He smoked fast and furiously. Presently he lighted another cigar against the tip of the first. He threw the butt away with an angry gesture.

Slumping down in his chair, he looked at the moon, but the moon held no interest for him. It was just a moon. It had been shining for a long time, and would continue to shine long after Thomas Kane had died in his bed, like an invalid or a very old man. He would never plunge from a saddle and die with his boots on. He was "hobbled good."

He got to wondering how the posse was faring. They ought to have bagged their

man by now. It was about eight hours since the sheriff had called Kane. Single-handed, Thomas had run down an outlaw in less than eight hours.

He rose and went into the sitting room, switching on the light. He had not known that Bessie was in the room. He had not even wondered where she was. He saw her curled up on the davenport. She lifted her head quickly, blinking against the light.

"Is there anything I can do for you, dear?" she asked.

"Who? Me?" said Kane, grouchy. "Reckon not, unless you get me a nurse, or have a guardian appointed for me!"

Bessie lay back on the davenport. Kane took up the telephone. He called the sheriff's office.

"That you, Bill?" he asked. "Oh, you, Buck! Say, you heard anything from the boys that went after that Shartel fellow? Not a thing, eh? Yes, it's me—Kane. No, I'm not sick. We-e-ell, I didn't go—couldn't make the rifle. Let me know when you hear anything."

He jammed the receiver on the hook, rose, and strode to the door. His face was white, and his teeth were sunk deep into his cigar.

"Wh-what did he say?" asked Bessie.

"That was the deputy that has charge of the jail," Kane answered, and a thin, bitter smile curled his lips. "He was just asking me why I didn't hit the trail with the sheriff. Wanted to know was I sick. Me, sick! His voice gave me a hint as to how he was looking at the matter. He knew the sheriff called for me, and here am I calling up to find out if that fellow has been caught!" He kicked open the screen door. "Blank, blank!" he burst out. "It's sickening!"

"You needn't swear," his wife said coldly.

"Swear?" Kane repeated. "If you call that swearing, you should have been out to the barn to-day. You'd have heard some *language* then!"

"Oh, I suppose you would rather be with that sweating, cursing, hard-riding, killing crew than safe home here with me," his wife said.

"You're damned well right," said Kane.

Bessie covered her ears. Kane went back to his seat.

He was on his fourth cigar when there was a clatter of hoofs on the cemented drive that wound up to the porch from the dirt

road below. Kane glimpsed a lathered horse with a stocky man astride it. The horse came to a whirling stop just below Kane.

"Hello, inside!" the rider called.

"I'm right here, sheriff," Kane said, rising. "What can I do for you?"

"Oh, you're right there, are you?" Sheriff Ledbetter asked. "Well, I'd like to know what in the blank blank you're doing right there! Sitting on top of the world, smoking a long cigar, hey, when me and the rest of the boys are riding these condemned hills looking for that escaped prisoner! You told me on the phone that you would be right with me. I only had four men. I was depending on you, Kane; and now here I am with a bullet through my shoulder, and forced to quit. The boys are pegging after that fellow, and they'll get him before dawn. He poked a bullet into me when I tried to rush him an hour ago. What's the matter with you, Kane? I just stopped to see. Have you lost your nerve since you married the soft-handed lady from the East? Are you a man any more, or are you one of these here lounge lizards I've been reading about in the papers? Maybe you got an infection when you were sporting around in the big town."

Kane saw that Ledbetter was very angry. The sheriff, off his job, was a pleasant, mild-mannered man, a lover of peace. Now, having been disappointed by the best man hunter he had summoned, and having got a bullet in his shoulder, forcing him to quit the chase, he was so bitter that he forgot himself in his description of Kane's wife.

For eight hours Kane had been a sufferer from about all the evil emotions known to man. He had felt scorn and hate and bitter anger and resentment. He had even whispered in his heart that Bessie was no sort of wife for a man like himself. At the first hint of danger she had been—well, yellow, if he had to say it.

Kane might think such thoughts himself, but he would allow no other man to think anything similar, much less to give voice to it. He rose swiftly from his chair and descended to Ledbetter's side.

"What you've said about me can ride as it is," he said harshly, lifting flaming eyes to the sheriff's face; "but you can back up on what you said about my wife. You can refer to her as Mrs. Kane, and not in any other way. You get me?"

His hand slipped down, but his belt was not there. Belt and guns still lay on the living room table.

The sheriff was very angry. His shoulder, roughly dressed, still throbbed and burned. He could get no relief until he reached the doctor's office, whither he had been riding when he stopped at Kane's. However, he was a just man, standing four-square, and he believed he had never spoken slightly of a woman before.

Of course, he had reckoned in his own mind that Kane, when he got his money, could have married an Oklahoma girl, and could have done at least as well as he had done by going abroad for a wife; but that was only a natural tribute to the home girls. The sheriff saw now that Kane had just cause for his stand.

"I take back what I said about your wife," he told his former deputy; "but if I made any reference to you, it lies. I saw you make a move for your gun a minute ago. You hadn't it with you, but if you want to go in the house and get it, I'll wait. When a man goes yellow, there's no reason to be afraid of him!"

It was the supreme insult, but in the face of it Kane only looked at the sheriff out of shamed and agonized eyes.

"You have a bullet in your right shoulder, sheriff," he said lamely. "You couldn't shoot it out with me."

"Couldn't?" cried the sheriff. "Couldn't, when I still have my left hand? You go get your guns, and we'll see. I'll even holster with you, and draw with my left hand."

"I'm not fighting," replied Kane, dropping his eyes.

"You're yellow, then!" said the sheriff. "You can't deny it! You've gone stale and soft, living up here in all this luxury. You ride in an automobile oftener than you fork a horse. You're afraid to risk your precious carcass, for fear you might suffer a little, and have to leave your ease and comfort for a while. It certainly is hell what money will do to a man that used to be as good as you were. Well, climb your stoop and hit your rocking-chair, and rot there, for all of me! I'm not wasting my time on anybody except *men*!"

Thomas Kane stood with bowed head, each word of the sheriff's seeming like a blow in the face.

Ledbetter's shoulder was in flames now. He sat his horse, his face twisted with pain, disappointment, and anger, and looked

down at Kane, viciously enjoying the scorn that he heaped on a man in whom ease and luxury had evidently developed a yellow streak.

He caught up his reins, and was about to put spurs to his horse. He wanted to get away from Kane. Already he had a prevision of the sorrow he would feel when, his wound cooled, he considered the matter more calmly. He had admired Kane, and liked him more than any man he had ever ridden with or sent upon a hazardous errand alone.

Before he could send his horse loping down the drive, the screen door was thrown open, and Bessie came out on the porch. She came like a whirlwind, and from his horse's back the sheriff could see the blaze in her brown eyes. In her right hand she held an automatic pistol, a present from Kane. She had been afraid of his big guns when he had wanted to teach her to handle them, and he had bought her this small pistol, which he considered a toy. She had learned to shoot with it, and Ledbetter did not need to be told that it was a deadly weapon. It could send out a stream of bullets, any one of which would instantly kill a man if it struck a vital part.

Bessie leveled the pistol at the man on the horse.

"Every word you've said about my husband is a lie!" she cried passionately. "He isn't yellow, as you call it. He went and got his guns, and was buckling on his belt, a few minutes after you phoned him. I stopped him. I wouldn't let him go on that man hunt. He has risked his life often enough. He has done his share of that kind of work in this county. I'm not going to be made a widow quite so soon. You will just apologize to him, Mr. Sheriff, for what you said!"

Ledbetter made a sound in his throat. A great stillness came to his stocky body. At home he had a wife and three children, yet he rode out after outlaws and was not afraid, nor was his wife afraid. It was all in the day's work, or the night's work; but he wouldn't tell this girl that. She was too soft for the life out here. She had struck a snap, and she wasn't going to let that snap be disturbed, no matter how many outlaws menaced the countryside.

His eyelids drooping, his lips thinned to a straight line, he looked at Bessie.

"Supposing I don't apologize," he said. "What then?"

"You've got to apologize," Bessie declared, "and you've got to promise that you will spread no false stories about my husband."

"I don't argue with women," Ledbetter snapped. "I've said my last word and asked my last question. I reckon your shooting time has come. Let her pop!"

He turned in the saddle and faced her, his big chest outthrust so that it offered a perfect target.

Bessie stood looking at him for a moment. Her eyes widened. This was her first experience with a man like Ledbetter, and it gave her a better understanding of the kind of man her husband was.

Once, in the city, she had seen a man shot to death in the street by a policeman. She had stood back from the restaurant window, and had seen people run in panic from the bullets; but here was a man who not only made no move to flee, but turned his body so that he exposed himself the more. She shivered, and her hand dropped.

The sheriff laughed sardonically. He couldn't help it.

Below him Kane's face was suddenly lifted. It was dark and twisted from a passion rising like a storm in the man's breast.

"You better ride on, sheriff," he said in a low voice.

What the sheriff had said to Kane he had said in anger. He knew that his old associate was not yellow. He was resentful because the outlaw had got a bullet into him, and was, so far as Ledbetter knew, still at large in the hills. He had particularly wanted Kane on this hunt, and Kane had disappointed him.

Shartel was no ordinary criminal. He was a big fellow, fearless in his way, ruthless, a killer by nature. No wonder the sheriff had wanted the best manhood the county afforded; but now he saw why Kane had held back. He was tied to his wife's apron strings. His wife wouldn't let him hit the trail.

That was strange, too. She seemed to be a fighter when she got angry. She had made a bluff at a gun play. Of course, the sheriff had known she wouldn't shoot him; but Kane's tone now was not the tone of a yellow man.

Ledbetter knew that if he tarried for two more minutes, Kane would go for his guns. The sheriff could guess what Tom's feelings were. Moreover, having had his little explosion, the sheriff felt better. Without a

word to either of them, he put spurs to his horse and swept down the drive, his right arm hanging limp.

Kane stood staring after the sheriff until the pounding of the horse's hoofs was no longer audible. Then he turned and went slowly up the steps. He glanced at the gun in his wife's hand.

"You'd better put that away," he said, and there was a trace of a sneer in his voice. "You wouldn't shoot anybody. This isn't a shooting family. It's a family of pacifics. Oh, how we do like our peace and quiet!"

Bessie dropped the gun into the pocket of her house dress, which she had not changed after supper. Kane walked over to the porch swing and dropped himself, full length, into it.

"You'd better go to bed," he told his wife. "You don't want to miss your rest. This is the restingest family in the whole State of Oklahoma. We rest, and Shartel roams the hills to-night. Oh, Lord!"

"I—I wasn't afraid to pull a gun on the sheriff," Bessie said. "I—I was just doing it for you. He might have drawn his own gun and shot me."

Kane made a sound that cannot be fitly described. He sprawled on the bed of the swing and waved his hands.

"Ledbetter shoot a woman!" he choked. "Can you beat that? Oh, go in the house, girl! You're hopping from one deep puddle to a deeper one."

Bessie went into the house and curled up on the davenport. She did not cry. She was filled with a fierce hate. She didn't know exactly whom she hated. It was Ledbetter, perhaps. Surely not her husband!

After a while she dozed. Kane went her one better. In spite of the turmoil of his mind, he dropped into a deep sleep. What was there for a yellow cur like him to do except to go to sleep? Thus he scorned himself as he drifted away.

At about that time, up in the moonlight-flooded hills, Shartel, the outlaw, was abandoning a horse whose wind had gone. He climbed a hill and began a wide detour, hoping to throw his pursuers off the track. If he didn't throw them off the track, he would kill as many as possible of them. He knew he had already winged the sheriff.

Shartel was a killer. While a boy, he had begun to buck the law, and he was still bucking it. If his own safety, his own liberty, depended upon killing half a dozen

men, he would kill them with no more sympathy for them than an ordinary man would feel toward half a dozen flies he had whacked to death.

#### IV

KANE was a sound sleeper, ordinarily, and he could sleep on any kind of couch, but to-night he did not sleep well. It was not that the porch swing made a poor bed. It had heavy springs and deep cushions, and made a far better resting place than Kane had often known; but after an hour of slumber he awoke, and was dully aware that his happiness had been shattered.

He groaned, turned over, and dozed. Then he dropped far into sleep again. He came out of this to consider his plight dully. He groaned a second time, and dozed once more.

What with his sleeping, his uncomfortable waking, and his dozing, he seemed to have passed a long time on the porch. He lifted his head, looking for streaks of dawn, but the sky was still the sky of night. Kane yanked out his watch, and found that the hands marked five minutes to twelve. He wound the watch from force of habit, and stuffed it back in his pocket.

He turned over on his back, and clasped his hands behind his head. He had never suffered from insomnia, and he wondered what was keeping him awake. His quarrel with Bessie, probably—their first quarrel, the little rift which might widen until it became a gulf impassable.

Perhaps he had better go in and see Bessie. He judged that she was still lying on the davenport. She had not gone upstairs while he had been awake. Probably she had fallen asleep and was taking her rest. Rest! What a damnable thing rest could be, when a man should have been in action, seeking Shartel!

In that instant the dull turning over of Thomas Kane's mind stopped. He sat up quickly, and as quickly dropped his feet soundlessly to the porch floor. Through the stillness of the night had come the drumming of a horse's hoofs.

Kane stood erect, and ran to the end of the porch. His ears sought the sound of other horses' hoofs, for he had had a quick mental picture of Shartel fleeing before the sheriff's posse, or some members of it; but no other sound materialized.

The first sound came nearer, and then it abruptly stopped. The dead silence of



midnight lay all about the man on the porch. He listened for a moment longer, to make sure that the horse was not ridden on again, and then he returned to the swing.

"Shartel wouldn't head this way," he told himself. "That was probably some one going home from town. He took a rush through the night, and then pulled his horse down. Looking at the moon, most likely. Probably he went to town to see some fool girl!"

Kane lay down in the hammock again, and again he slept. He awoke slowly, and felt sure that he had been roused by something unusual. Senses trained to meet emergencies became suddenly alert. He did not stir on his couch. He knew that his slightest movement would betray him in this silence, for somehow he was sure that there was some one near him.

He was equally sure that it was not Bessie. Even though they had quarreled, Bessie's approach would not stir him with such an unpleasant sensation. He had been in so many tight places in his life that he had an instinct that this was one of those breathless moments which precede a battle.

Slowly he lifted his right hand, which had been lying on his chest. He slid the hand down to his hip, and then he remembered that his guns were in the living room. He swore silently. Should he make a dash for the door, and get his guns?

He got his answer immediately. The great bulk of a man reared itself on the top step of the porch.

The man was bareheaded, and Kane saw that his hair was close-cropped. He was dressed in overalls and a jumper. The top button of the jumper was unfastened, and Kane saw that there was no shirt beneath it. The top of a hairy chest was exposed.

Dropping his eyes, Kane saw that the man's feet were bare. That was how he had managed to creep up the steps without betraying just where he was.

The man lifted a foot and stepped up on the floor of the porch. He looked at the two screen doors—the one that led into the dining room and the one that led into the living room. Kane was sure that his eyes would turn to the swing, but they did not. He seemed to be debating which door he should use.

He finally decided on the dining room door. That carried him to the other end of the porch, and away from Kane. Kane knew that Bessie had not hooked the screen

of the living room door. At any rate, she had not done so while her husband was awake.

The man had a gun in his left hand. Now he shifted it to his right, while he prepared to try the door. Kane decided from that that he was left-handed. It might be a good thing to remember.

Kane lifted himself from the swing. He still wore his shoes, and they were new. He was rather clumsy in them, for he had never in the old days worn such fine, soft footwear. He wished now that he had removed the confounded things, but it was too late to remedy that.

He got to his feet just as the other man put his hand on the dining room door and tried to pull it open. That door was locked on the inside. Kane had taken only two steps when the intruder turned about. Kane dodged up against the house, into the shadows made by the porch ceiling; but he was not quick enough, and the shadows were not deep enough. The armed stranger caught sight of him at once. With a movement incredibly swift, he switched his gun from his right hand to his left.

He raised the weapon no higher than his hip, and Kane was sure that he was going to fire from there; but he did not do so. He came toward Kane slowly, keeping him covered.

"Stick yore hands up!" he whispered.

Kane now had no thought for himself. His fear was only for the girl curled up on the davenport in the living room. His job, he saw, was to divert the man from entering the house. He threw up his hands and stepped out into the moonlight.

"You've got me, Shartel," he said. "What do you want? What can I do for you?"

"Who are you?" Shartel demanded.

"Kane is my name," Kane answered.

"A-a-rgh!" Shartel spat out. "I know you! You was in the court room when I had my trial. You was standin' up ag'in' the wall, lookin' at me with them cold eyes of yourn. Yeh, I remember you! I remember all them fellas that had anything to do with puttin' me away. Yo're a deppity!"

"I'm not," Kane said. "I resigned some time ago."

It occurred to him that he might appease Shartel, and make him easier to handle, if he told the fellow that he had refused to answer the sheriff's call. He might even

add the story of the sheriff's derision and scorn; but his gorge rose at the thought. There were some things he could not do, and this was one of them. The very idea angered him, and when he spoke again his voice held an angry tone.

"What are you doing here, Shartel? What do you want?"

"Yo're talkin' sense," Shartel said. "I want three things—money, food, and a hoss. Yes, and some clothes. I reckon one of your suits would about fit me."

"You don't want much, do you?" Kane sneered.

Shartel's lids half closed, and behind them Kane could see the man's eyes gleam. His thick lips dropped apart, and he breathed noisily through them. A little brick-red color fought its way to his prison-pale cheeks.

Kane knew the signs. Lust to slay was sweeping Shartel. He would take delight in sending a bullet crashing into Kane's body. It was not that killing the former deputy would do the fugitive any good. It was not that Kane was opposing him, sneering at him. It was merely the desire of a poisoned mind to shed blood.

Kane knew this in the one instant during which his life hung in the balance. He had seen men like Shartel before—men who would murder wantonly. He braced himself for the impact of the bullet; but Shartel did not fire. Slowly he relaxed. The little color died out of his cheeks, leaving his face like chalk in the moonlight. His lips drew together, and he filled his lungs through distended nostrils. His eyes opened wide.

"You was close to it, fella!" he said in his low voice. "Don't you git that notion into my head again. It was all I could do to pull myself back that one time. One more time will be one too many. Only reason I didn't shoot you was because I ain't got much time, an' I can use you. I don't want to go searchin' the house for the things I need. Who else is in the house, anyhow?"

"Only my wife," Kane answered.

"Well, where is she?"

"She went to bed a long time ago," Kane said. "I fell asleep in the swing."

"How much money you got in the house?"

Kane's red-blooded anger swept up through him again. He was being held up by the man whom he should have followed

into the hills and captured. On his wife's account he would have to give Shartel whatever the man demanded. He couldn't strike a blow in his own defense. Shartel had him covered, and would shoot him if necessary. That would leave Bessie at the mercy of the outlaw. Kane saw that there was nothing for him to do but yield.

"There's something over three hundred dollars," Kane said.

"Ah!" exulted Shartel. "That would be a nice little wad. I got an idee yo're tellin' the truth. Scared you, hain't I? Well, you lead the way into the house, an' I'll foller you. I'll have my gun in the small of yore back. Rustle food, clothes, and money in a hurry, and then a hoss. What kind o' horseflesh you got?"

"About as good as any that travels hereabouts."

"That's fine! When I seen this here place, I said to myself I'd be liable to make a haul. Things is breakin' even better than I looked for. I didn't have to bust into the house an' take a chance on gettin' a bullet into me. You was layin' out, waitin' for me. My, my, but yo're an obligin' kind of a pup! Go on in the house and rustle the stuff for me!"

Kane started for the dining room door, making as if to pass around the outlaw. Shartel intercepted him with an angry mutter.

"That door is locked, an' you know it," he said. "Don't you try no tricks with me! I tell you I'll stick a bullet plumb through you if you don't do exactly what I tell you. How about this here door?"

"My wife is in that room," Kane had to tell him, for he knew that Bessie, lying on the davenport, would not escape Shartel's keen eyes. "I don't want her disturbed. You wait here, and I'll get the stuff and bring it to you."

"If you don't open that door an' step inside lively, I'll kill you, an' then I'll go in an' kill yore woman," Shartel declared. "You ain't got more 'n three seconds to make a move!"

Kane opened the door. A wave of dizziness swept through him as he did so. Leading this outlaw into Bessie's presence nauseated him; yet, for her sake, he could do no less. He knew Shartel would kill him if he disobeyed, and then Bessie would be left without protection.

Shartel's eyes swept the room, and came to rest on the girl on the davenport. They

rested on her briefly, for Shartel was one of those criminals who hold women in supreme contempt. To him they were not only the weaker sex; they were the useless sex.

"Where's your guns?" Shartel asked.

"I keep only one gun in the house," Kane said. "It's upstairs, in the dresser."

In spite of himself, his eyes wandered to the table upon which he had laid his belt. He saw that Bessie had removed her apron and had tossed it over the guns and the belt. That, he supposed, had been accidental, but he thanked God for it. He might yet get his hands on one of those guns. If he did, he would shoot it out with Shartel. He would surely shoot it out!

He took a deep breath, as he realized that for the first time since the sheriff had phoned him he might be able to face the issue cleanly and calmly.

"Well, where's the coin?" Shartel snapped.

"In a safe upstairs," Kane answered.

Shartel opened his lips to speak. Then his eyes sought the form on the davenport.

"That woman of yours is a damned sound sleeper," he said. "I'll have a look at her."

He walked over to the davenport. Kane edged toward the table. Shartel wheeled about.

"I thought you must have a gun handy some place," he sneered. "Goin' for it, wasn't you?"

He walked over to the table and picked up Bessie's apron. He chuckled when he saw the belt and the guns.

"I held up a guy in the hills to get this gun an' these clothes," he said. "The clothes ain't much, an' the gun is a poor shootin' iron. I'm right pleased to get these two good guns!"

He buckled the belt about his waist. Without a glance at Bessie, whose sleeping he had used for an excuse to trap her husband, he ordered Kane to mount the stairs. Kane could only obey.

In the room above the living room, Kane snapped on a light.

"Turn that off!" Shartel commanded. "Some of them guys may be near here, though I think I give them the slip. D'you want to attract their attention, an' have them come pilin' in on us here? Why, I'll kill you at the first sign!"

Kane switched off the light, and knelt before a small safe in one corner of the

room. He began to twirl the knob, while Shartel stood behind him with a gun against his neck. Kane considered trying to dodge under the gun and come up along Shartel's body, grappling with him, but he knew he would not be successful in that. Shartel was too quick; so he continued to twirl the knob.

"It's takin' you a long time," Shartel grumbled. "Git the thing open. I ain't got no time to waste, I tell you!"

"Open it yourself, then," Kane said, knowing he could safely show a certain amount of defiance, now that Shartel was so near the money he so badly needed. "I'm not a safe expert. I have to take this thing slow and easy."

He could have opened the safe more quickly than he did, but at last he knew he could waste no more time. Shartel's temper was too uncertain. He swung the door back.

"Bring out all the money you got," Shartel said hoarsely. "I'll take a look after you do, to make sure you've swept her clean."

Kane drew out a bundle of bank notes. Shartel stooped a little and plucked them from his hand.

There was a slight noise behind the two men. Shartel was not taken off his guard. He did not wheel about, so that his back would be to Kane. He sprang to one side, like a great cat, and backed against the wall.

One of Kane's guns came into view. He looked over his shoulder. Bessie was standing just inside the door, her automatic pistol pointed at Shartel.

Kane saw that his wife's face was as pale as Shartel's own. Her eyes were wide with a kind of frozen horror; but the hand that held the gun did not tremble. She was using all her strength, all her courage, to keep it steady.

"Put up your hands!" she said. "I'll shoot you if you don't!"

The outlaw laughed mockingly. Bessie thrust forward her head, to stare the harder. She could not understand how the man could have the courage to laugh.

"Lady," said Shartel, "you ain't goin' to shoot me. You better not. I been in more shootin' scrapes than I've kep' track of. You ain't used to handlin' a gun—I can see that plain. I can tell two seconds before you press that trigger that yo're goin' to do it. Folks that hain't used to guns

has to make up their minds to shoot. Folks like me just naturally shoot. I can tell when you get ready to shoot. Before you ever press that trigger, yore eyes will blink once or twice, an' just once will be enough. I'll plug both you an' yore husband before you git a bullet into me. When I shoot, I kill. There won't be no blinking over this way. Why, you little fool, I could plug you both, even if you did stick a bit of lead from that toy into me. I could keep my feet for five minutes after I was hit. If you don't think I'm tellin' you the truth, ask yore husband. *He knows!*"

"Put down your gun, Bessie," Kane said. "You can't get him. He'll kill us both. He may do it at any minute, as it is. If he gets a sudden notion, he will begin shooting. He's a killer."

"Take the gun away from her an' drop it on the floor," Shartel ordered.

Kane advanced to Bessie and took the gun from her hand. He had an impulse to wheel and shoot it out with Shartel, but he did not obey the impulse. Shartel would probably shoot him down as he made his turning movement, and then Bessie would be alone with the outlaw.

He let the pistol clatter on the floor, and stepped back to the safe. He had dropped the money when Bessie entered the room, and now he stooped to pick it up. As he did so, there was an explosion from one of Shartel's guns, terrifyingly loud in the limited space of the room.

Kane went to his knees, and turned to look at his wife. She staggered to the dresser and caught hold of it, to give her horror-filled brain time to clear.

"I didn't hit her," Shartel said maliciously. "I was just showin' her how close I could come to her head an' not bury a bullet in her brain. She started the shootin' talk. I didn't. I wasn't botherin' her."

Kane, still on his knees, turned his eyes on Shartel. He began to rail at him in a low voice.

"I'll kill you for this later on, Shartel, if it takes a lifetime!" he said.

Shartel menaced him with the two big guns.

"Gimme that money," he ordered. "Then have yore woman rustle me some grub. You rustle some clothes, an' come with me. I'm done foolin'!"

Bessie turned about from the dresser, and managed a faint smile, for the benefit of her husband.

"Obey him, Thomas," she said. "You can't do anything else. I could have shot him in the back, but I remembered that you said men were never shot in the back in this country; and so I missed my chance. We've just got to do as he says and get him out of the house."

"Lady, you got sense!" said Shartel, with an evil grin.

## V

KANE rose and handed the roll of bills to the escaped convict, who stuffed it into his overalls pocket.

"Now the clothes," said Shartel. "You seem to be well fixed, an' you must have some good suits. Just hand me out one of the best, an' the trimmin's that go with it, includin' shoes."

Kane laid out one of his new suits and the "trimmings" that Shartel required.

"Where's the keys to the house?" the outlaw asked.

"Downstairs," Bessie answered. "I'll get them."

"Yeh, you'll get them!" Shartel laughed. "We'll all go get them. We're a nice little party of three, an' I ain't goin' to let it be busted up, even for a second. Yo're a woman of spirit, lady, an' I ain't trustin' you to amble downstairs by yoreself to get them keys. Come along, mister! Herd yore wife ahead of you, an' you'll find me behind you, with these here guns ready."

They returned to the living room, and Bessie produced the keys from the table. Shartel took them.

"Upstairs again," he ordered.

Kane and Bessie could do nothing but obey, though Kane was watching for an opportunity to engage Shartel if he could do so without danger to his wife.

The convict looked into a room opposite the one they had entered before. Driving them into the room, he examined the windows and the screens, and then opened one of the screens and looked to the ground.

"I reckon you'll be safe in here for a while," he said. "I don't think either of you will take a chance on jumping to the ground. You might, mister, but yore wife would be sure to hurt herself. If you jump an' leave the lady here—"

He shrugged his thick shoulders, and the gesture was sufficiently suggestive of what he would do in that contingency.

"I'm not deserting my wife," Kane said coldly.



"That's what I'm figgerin'," Shartel grinned. "You see, a man in my fix has to do a little figgerin' now an' then!"

He slipped through the door and slammed it, and they heard the key turn in the lock.

"Can't we escape?" Bessie whispered.

"We might if we had a little more time," Kane answered; "but as it is, we'll have to wait for him. I would have to make a rope out of the bedclothing, lower you, and then go down on it myself. Shartel will be back before that."

"If we could only get to one of the cars!" Bessie lamented.

"No time," Kane said. "Our only hope is to get into action promptly after he leaves."

"We can telephone the sheriff and people along the different roads," Bessie suggested hopefully.

"Hush!" said Kane. "He's coming back!"

The key was again turned in the lock, and Shartel came in, fully dressed, except for collar, coat, and tie. He wore one of Kane's new hats pulled down over his eyes.

"Stand over against the wall," he ordered. "There! Now I can spruce myself up an' keep an eye on you in the glass."

He put his guns, including Bessie's automatic, on the dresser, and adjusted the collar and tie. Then he slipped into the coat. Turning away from the glass, he eyed Mrs. Kane malevolently.

"The coat fits a little snug," he said, "but it 'll get me by. I ain't such a bad-looking fella when I'm dressed up, am I, ma'am?"

"Oh, you're handsome," Bessie sneered.

Shartel chuckled. Things were coming his way as he had not dared to hope they would come since he escaped from the prison in the darkness of a storm. He could afford to be amused by the girl's anger.

"Well, maybe I ain't so much to look at, lady," he taunted; "but you'll have to give me credit for bein' some hoss when it comes to action!"

"First chance I get, I'm going to kill you," Bessie declared.

Shartel stared at her. He was about to laugh again, but something in her eyes checked his mirth.

"By gosh!" he said. "I believe you would, at that, if you got the chance. I

dunno how come you ever hooked up with this weak-kneed guy you got here. I'd think a lady like you would be pickin' a he-man!"

"My husband and you will meet again," said Bessie wrathfully.

Kane smiled grimly to himself. His dear wife seemed to have suffered a change of mood.

"Downstairs we go," said Shartel.

He forced them out to the hall, and locked the doors of both rooms.

"Now you rustle whatever food is ready," he ordered, when they had returned below. "Wrap it up for me. I'll eat it on my way."

Bessie hastened to wrap up some cold meat, bread, and cake. The hope that they were to be rid of this brutal ruffian lent speed to her movements. In a few minutes she laid a package on the kitchen table.

"Take it and go," she said.

"You betcha!" Shartel agreed. "I'm glad the fellas in that posse got a look at me when I downed their mighty sheriff. They'll be lookin' for a guy in overhauls an' jumpers. They won't be lookin' for no dressed-up guy like me. Now, lady, to the living room with you, an' I'll be on my way. Where's yore hat, mister?"

"I don't need any hat," Kane answered.

"Suit yoreself," Shartel returned. "You can ride bareheaded, if you like."

"Ride?" said Kane.

"Sure thing! You think I'm goin' to leave you here? Not much! Yo're ridin' with me, to give me what pertection you kin. I'd take the woman, too, but women is always in the way. Come on to that front room now!"

In the living room Shartel locked all the doors and examined the windows.

"I see you can get out of one of them windows without much trouble, lady," he said. "Well, we'll be on our way before you git started. An' I want to tell you that the minute it looks like I'm goin' to be shot down or stuck up, I'm goin' to stick a bullet into yore husband. You better stay quiet, an' let me make my get-away all peaceable an' nice!"

He looked about the room, after he had locked the doors and fastened the windows. His eyes lighted on the telephone. He took it up and yanked the cord until it broke.

"There!" he said. "You'll have to travel some little distance before you can

git word to anybody. I picked this here house for my raid 'cause it stood so far away from any other house. Git goin', mister!"

Kane stepped out of the room, with Shartel at his back. The convict locked the door through which they passed, imprisoning Bessie within the room.

"Now for yore stable!" he said.

Kane led him out to the stable. Just beyond it, on the rear drive, was a two-car garage. Shartel's eyes suddenly gleamed.

"You got automobiles, have you?" he queried.

"I suppose I have," Kane answered.

"Which of these keys unlocks that shed?"

"The small flat one."

Shartel handed the keys to Kane.

"Open her up an' lemme have a look," he ordered.

Kane walked over to the garage, and unlocked and opened the door. Shartel uttered a joyful exclamation.

"Gosh!" he said. "This is my lucky night! This beats the second hoss I stole an' come here on. Which of them two cars is the fastest?"

"There's not much difference in their speed," Kane answered.

"Run the big one out here."

All along fury had been burning in Kane—fury and a wild disgust. That this big brute should be commanding Bessie and himself to obey his wishes, and enforcing his commands with guns, was sickening. Kane had all he could do to control himself, and the effort and his anger burned his big body dry.

"I can't run the car," he said. "I ride a horse when I want to go any place."

"Somebody's been runnin' the car recent," Shartel said. He shoved one of his guns viciously into the small of Kane's back. "Either you or the woman can run it. If you can't, I'll knock you cold with the butt of this gun, an' then I'll go into the house and get her, an' make her run the car. Git that car out here or take yore smash on the back of yore head. Quick!"

Kane went into the garage, climbed into the car, and backed it into the drive. Shartel got into the back seat.

"You sure you got plenty gas?" he asked.

"The tank is full."

"Git, then! Don't mind about the speed laws. Gas is for speed. On this occasion it

beats a hoss. Drive fast in any direction that 'll git me out of the county an' allow you to pick the best roads. If we meet any one, I'll be crouchin' here in the dark. If yo're stopped, you tell 'em you haven't seen me. Tell 'em yore wife is sick, an' yo're on yore way for a doctor. Yuh understand me?"

"I understand," said Kane.

"If yo're held up, an' you don't git me by safe, I'll just rise up an' plug you. Then I'll shoot it out with whoever does the holdin' up. I'm well pervided for now, an' well on my way. They'll never take me back to that cussed pen! I'm goin' to be free, or I'm goin' to be dead. You've handled men before. You know whether I mean that or not. Drive on now, and make the wind blow!"

Kane knew that the man was in earnest. He drove to the road, turned into it, and opened up. The car sped away in the moonlight.

## VI

KANE knew the roads and trails in his county better even than the sheriff knew them. He had been over them all on various errands. He had hunted in the hills for both game and men. Trails that few other men ever traversed were like highways to him. He could find his way on them in the dark, and had often done so.

As he drove, he turned over in his mind half a dozen plans for outwitting Shartel. They were man to man now. Bessie's fear had put Kane in a position whose consideration still sent flushes of shame through his body. He had let Shartel remain master of the situation so far only to protect his wife. Now he felt that he had played that game long enough.

Bessie was free from harm, though her husband knew, of course, that if the outlaw killed him, she would suffer more than if injury had come to herself. She had been timid at the beginning, but Kane knew that only fear for himself had ruled her. He did not doubt that she would readily have given her own life to save his.

Now he forced thoughts of his wife aside. He would have died rather than make her suffer, but he had a duty to perform, and it was a duty which must be performed at whatever sacrifice. For one thing, he must wipe out the stain on his reputation, and he must also—which was more important—prevent Shartel from getting out of the

county, as he planned. He must deliver the escaped convict to the sheriff, or Shartel must kill him.

All the instincts of the man who had hunted many criminals were alive now; but no plan of action seemed to give any great hope of success. He was sitting with his back to Shartel. The man had two guns. Any hostile move that Kane might make would be promptly answered with lead. He must keep on thinking, thinking, and be ready to take advantage of any opportunity that offered itself.

For a while the car sped along on a paved road. It was making thirty-five miles an hour, and Shartel, unused to automobiles and unable to guess its speed, seemed to be satisfied. There was no sound from him. A glance over Kane's shoulder showed that he was crouched down so that he would not be seen if the car should meet another. This was unlikely, however, because Kane judged that the hour must be about two o'clock, and cars were few at that time of the early morning.

In half an hour the smooth surface ended, and the car leaped out on a dirt road. This was rocky, hilly country, and there were stones in the road. Kane eased down to thirty miles, and then to twenty. At once he heard his passenger stir, and a gun was pushed between his shoulder blades.

"Git goin' again!" Shartel ordered. "Don't you go to losin' no time!"

The man's voice was thick. Kane understood that he had been wolfing the food that Bessie had wrapped up for him.

"Th's is a bad road, you fool!" Kane retorted. "If we go faster than this, we're liable to ditch the car."

"You better not ditch the car," Shartel said. "You can do better than this an' keep her out of the ditch. Git goin', I tell you!"

Kane brought the speed to twenty-five miles. A backward glance showed Shartel sitting erect, gnawing at bread and meat with his great yellow teeth. He opened his mouth wide as he worked his jaws, and he slobbered and wiped his chin with the sleeve of Kane's coat.

Kane swore under his breath. This farce had gone on long enough. The showdown would have to come sooner or later, and it might as well come soon. The peril would be no greater now than after a while.

Kane decided that there was little likelihood of anything happening which he

could turn to his own use and to Shartel's disadvantage. It looked as if he would merely have to take the long chance and abide by the result.

He glanced at the rocky hillsides below which the car was passing. He knew precisely where he was. He projected his mind forward along the road.

Half a mile from here there was a turn, not very abrupt, but sufficiently so to warrant his slowing down. Beyond the turn there was a stretch of road that was smoother than this. At the roadside there was a big boulder which had rolled down the hill into the road. It had been pushed to one side, to get it out of the way of the scant traffic. Opposite the boulder the country leveled out. Instead of a drop, there were big trees, which grew for a quarter of a mile, until they reached the jutting rim of the hills again.

Kane settled himself in his seat, his lips tight, his eyes glowing. The long chance he was going to take was very near. He could not even guess what its outcome would be.

Before he reached the turn in the road, he slowed down and stopped. Shartel's gun was instantly between his shoulders again.

"Whatcha doin'?" the outlaw demanded.

"I thought I heard a car coming from the other direction," Kane said. "Listen!"

The coming of another car would be an important event for Shartel, and his attention was instantly caught and held. He turned his head a little, the better to listen.

"No—I don't hear nothin'," he growled presently.

"I reckon I was mistaken," Kane said.

When he stopped the car, he had switched off the lights, and his hand had stolen to the door beside him. He opened it an inch, so that he could kick it fully open when the time came. He had given Shartel something to think about. He had revived in the outlaw's mind the fear that they might come upon a car filled with men loaded with six-shooters and shotguns.

Shartel withdrew his gun from Kane's back, and leaned over the back of the front seat. His face was even with the driver's shoulder. Kane had a notion to let go of the wheel, swing round, and smash his fist against Shartel's jaw; but he dismissed the idea. The blow would have to land exactly, and to have all the power of Kane's arm and shoulder behind it, in order to

render Shartel incapable of using his guns. If he were not put out completely, he could fire as he fell back, and at that short range he would hardly miss. Kane resolved to adhere to his original plan.

He turned on the lights, but dimmed them. Starting the car, he went slowly around the curve. The car picked up a little. Its lights picked out the boulder by the roadside. Kane sent the car ahead with a suddenness that threw Shartel back in his seat.

Before the convict could regain an upright position, Kane increased the speed still more, and swerved the car straight for the big stone. At the same instant he kicked open the door. Just before the car struck, he hurled himself through the door and landed sprawling in the dirt of the road.

Ahead of him there was a crash. The car struck the stone, backed away from it, rose on two wheels, settled back, and came to a standstill.

All this Kane saw over his shoulder as he sprang to his feet and dashed for the shelter of the big trees. He knew that Shartel had been thrown about in the back of the car. Before the convict could get the door open and get out, supposing that he was not injured, Kane would be in the shelter of the trees.

But he had not reckoned on the agility of the big man. Shartel, thrown from his seat, still had gripped his guns. He could not use them instantly, however, for he found himself tumbled backward upon the floor of the car. Just before his hat settled over his eyes, he saw Kane spring from the car. He pulled himself together swiftly. Getting to his feet, he took both his guns in one hand and twisted the handle of the door with the other. Then he kicked the door open and jumped into the road.

Kane was just disappearing among the trees. Shartel fired with both guns simultaneously, from each hip. He was a killer and an expert shot. The two bullets ripped across the back of Kane's coat as he took a forward step in the brief fraction of time he had before Shartel pressed the triggers.

Then the trees took Kane. With a cry of rage, the convict pursued him, firing among the trees as he went.

Kane, however, knew the locality, and Shartel did not. For a few minutes the outlaw could hear the crackling of dry

branches beneath the fleeing man's feet, and he fired in the direction of the sounds till his guns were empty. Then he had to stop to reload. When he was ready to take up pursuit again, there was no sound among the trees.

## VII

WHEN Shartel stopped to reload his guns, Kane was less than a hundred yards from him. He was standing behind a big oak tree, waiting to determine whether Shartel would pursue him. He knew that the outlaw had followed the sound of his flight till he stopped, for Shartel's bullets flew in that general direction. However, they were little menace to Kane. Some of them buried themselves in intervening trees, and others sped harmlessly by.

When Kane stopped, the firing ceased, and the noise of Shartel's pursuit ceased also. Kane had counted the shots, and he easily guessed that the convict had halted to reload.

Kane did not know, of course, how much of a woodsman Shartel was. Doubtless he had been a fugitive many times, and he must know something of the craft, and of the intricacies of the chase. Kane did not believe, however, that the outlaw could creep up on him without his becoming aware of it. The course that Shartel pursued must govern the course that Kane must pursue.

Shartel could do one of two things—he could continue his flight on foot, or he could return to Kane's home. From this resulted the dilemma in which Kane found himself. If Shartel traveled away from the house, Kane could follow him till he found a telephone or a place where he could obtain guns and help. If the outlaw returned to the bungalow, Kane knew that he must be close on the man's heels, for Shartel would now be in no mood to take chances. He would either steal a horse, make Bessie drive him away in the other car, or—perhaps something worse.

Decision was difficult. If Kane returned to his home, he could anticipate Shartel's arrival. He could get into the bungalow by a window and take from the dresser drawer the old gun about which he had spoken to Shartel. The convict had overlooked that gun after they went upstairs. He seemed to have forgotten it.

On the other hand, if Shartel did not go back to Kane's and Kane went there by



a way he knew, he would have lost the trail of the fugitive. His own telephone was out of commission, and the nearest house was a mile away from where he stood among the trees.

He decided, at last, that the only thing he could do was to wait for Shartel to make a move. This was dangerous, for the outlaw might have a blunderer's luck. Doubly armed, he might stumble on Kane, while the latter had no weapon of any kind.

Kane had no doubt that Shartel would kill him if he found him now, for the outlaw would be possessed by a red rage, and he would want to destroy the man who knew where he was. Also, since the car was disabled, Kane would be of no further assistance to the fugitive.

Kane stood and waited. Ten minutes passed. During those ten minutes no sound was audible. The brooding night silence was unbroken, and the trees were so thick and heavily leaved that little of the moonlight filtered through them.

Kane stood in a darkness which concealed him. It concealed Shartel, too. He would give no warning of his approach, except as he might break a limb or a twig under his feet. There was a carpet of these twigs and limbs all through the woods. The trees were oak, and they shed their brittle branches whenever there was a high wind.

At the end of the ten minutes Kane caught the sound for which he was listening. A dry branch, probably as thick as a man's finger, snapped with a report which seemed loud in that deep silence.

The sound came from beyond Kane. He knew then that Shartel had passed him at a distance of perhaps fifty feet, and had gone on a hundred feet or so farther. This showed that the outlaw knew how to travel in the darkness of the timber. He had progressed silently till he betrayed himself by stepping on a brittle branch. Probably he had become a little careless after moving so far without making a sound. Kane became aware that the brute against whom he was matching his wits was a woodsman, and therefore all the more dangerous in this particular situation.

Kane let more slow minutes slip by. The unbroken silence held. He decided to move in Shartel's direction, stepping from tree to tree. The outlaw had proved that he could move without sound, and even now he might be creeping away.

Kane safely gained the spot from which he judged the sound of the breaking branch had come. He peered from behind a tree, but there was no sign of Shartel.

He moved up closer to a huge oak which was directly before him. The convict might easily be behind that. He bent low as he came to the tree, and then cautiously thrust his head around the trunk. The tree concealed no one. Kane stood up and wiped his forehead.

"I can't stay here," he told himself. "I've got to get back to Bessie. Protecting her from that big brute is the main job right now!"

He turned and made for the road. The moon had passed the zenith by now, and when Kane reached the road its light was flooding along the clay ribbon, making it lighter than the early dawn would have made it.

For a space he stood by the roadside and waited. Behind him there was suddenly the first twitter of awakening birds, heralding the dawn. Far off, roosters aroused themselves to greet the coming day. Haste was needed now, Kane decided, for whatever Shartel did would be done quickly. He had only a little time to work under cover of darkness.

Kane went along the road till he came to his wrecked car. After a moment of listening, he stepped out to it. A swift examination showed that the front of the car was badly smashed, but Kane had a notion that it might at least limp back home. He decided to make the attempt to get to Bessie. Her safety was his first consideration, even though his capture of Shartel would have redeemed him in the sheriff's eyes, and in the eyes of the men who were still beating the hills for the escaped convict.

He got into the car, and, after working for a while, managed to back it away from the boulder. There was something wrong with the engine, for it knocked and pounded in a way that was disgraceful in a machine so new and so expensive. Kane succeeded, however, in turning the car about in the road and heading it for home. He started it limping in that direction.

He had not gone a hundred feet when a bullet tore through the car above his head. He stopped at once, because there was nothing else for him to do. He knew that Shartel was firing on him from the roadside. The outlaw had eleven bullets remaining, and one of them would not fail to hit the

man at the wheel. Inwardly Kane cursed himself for the mistake he had made.

"It's hands up for mine, Shartel," he called disgustedly.

The convict stepped into the road from among the trees, and ran to the side of the car. He jammed a gun into Kane's ribs.

In all his experience with criminals the former deputy had never seen a face so torn with passion as Shartel's was now. The bloodless cheeks quivered as the mouth worked soundlessly. Such anger was sweeping the outlaw that for the moment he was incapable of utterance. His slitted eyes burned as if they had been coals lifted from a hot fire. The hand that held the gun was tense.

Apparently Shartel did not at the moment intend to shoot Kane, but the latter knew that he might do so accidentally, so far had his self-control been swept away from him. That thick forefinger might press the trigger without Shartel's willing it to do so.

"I've got both my hands up, you yellow cur!" Kane ground out. "What are you going to do?"

"Yellow cur, eh?" Shartel ground out in his turn. "A-a-rgh, but you'll never be closer to bein' blowed up than you are now! Only one thing saves you—if I kill you, an' they get me, they'll lynch me. They don't kill men legal in this State no more. If the chair was waitin' me, I'd kill you where you sit! Besides, I got to use you. I hate to use a white-livered pup like you, but I got to. Put down yore hands an' open that door!"

Kane obeyed. Shartel stepped into the seat beside him and pressed a gun into his ribs.

"Now you git back to yore house as quick as the devil will let you," he commanded. "We'll git that other car of yours, an' make another try. On this next trip I'll be waitin' to shoot you the minute you don't do what I tell you. I'll be sittin' by yore side right like this. You understand me? You understand that I'll shoot you the minute you make a false move?"

"I understand," Kane said grimly.

He understood what the outlaw was saying. He understood more. He would have to give his life to make sure that Shartel was captured. That seemed inevitable now.

By the time they got the other car and started out again, morning would have come. The people of the countryside would

be on the stir. Kane must somehow give the alarm to some of these, and must take Shartel's bullet. After that, the outlaw's chances of escape would be slight. He would be in a stalled car, which he could not drive. New posses would run him down before he could get away.

At least, Kane would wipe out the stain on his reputation. The sheriff would know that he was not yellow. Bessie would have to take what sad comfort she could in knowing that he had died game, like a man.

He sighed, nevertheless, when he thought of Bessie. Man hunts and gun plays were all new to her. He had taken her out of security, and fate had plunged them into an adventure as wild as any Kane had ever known. He had done everything he could to make her life safe and serene, but the cards seemed to have been stacked against her.

Shartel broke in on his thoughts.

"Can't you get no more speed than this out of the old boat?" he asked.

"I can't, and I doubt if she'll do as well as this before long," Kane retorted. "She's about as well able to travel as you'll be when you get a bullet in your lungs."

"When you get yore bullet, it won't be in yore lungs," Shartel retorted. "It 'll be in yore heart!"

"I suppose so," Kane returned. "You're the kind that would shoot an unarmed man through the heart."

"Wouldn't I, though?" said the outlaw, licking his lips.

The car came to a slight decline in the road. Beyond this there was a little rise. The car slipped down the hill, and started up the rise. It panted hard, and seemed about to stop, but it finally made the crest.

Kane looked ahead. On the level road before him he saw a man riding one of the horses of a harnessed team. He knew the man for a neighbor who lived about a mile away. He was taking his team to the far end of his five-hundred-acre farm. Kane had seen him working down there only a few days before.

In spite of himself, Kane felt a quiver go through his body. Shartel, watching him, with the gun prodded into his ribs, observed the quiver.

"Hopin', are you?" he whispered. "Well, don't you give this guy nary sign! If he speaks, you speak, an' that's all. Gct by him with a nod, if you can."

"If I thought he had a gun, I'd take a

chance," Kane said. "By the time you got me he'd get you."

"I got two guns," Shartel said. "Here he is. Lemme see you make a break to him!"

The man on the big lumbering horse stared curiously at the battered car.

"Had a smash-up, neighbor?" he asked. "Anything I kin do?"

"Hit that bowlder back there," Kane answered. "I can limp home, I reckon."

"I could haul you with the team," the man suggested. "It ain't so fur."

"I can make it," Kane said, and he kept on going.

The team pounded on. Kane turned to Shartel. His face was gray.

"I'll tell you this," he said in open anger.

"The first chance I get, I'm going to turn you in. That man's my neighbor. When the whole of this story is told, he'll have his piece to speak about how I had you in my car and rode by him, protecting you. You can kill me, Shartel, but I'm betting you now that the doors of the pen are already wide for you!"

"Mebbe," Shartel said; "but I'll kill you first!"

They spoke no more. Growing weaker and weaker, the car appeared to be ready at any moment to stop altogether; but at length they got into the drive leading to Kane's bungalow and garage.

"Git down," Shartel ordered, when Kane had driven the car beyond the garage.

Kane obeyed.

"Open the door an' git that other car out here," Shartel said.

Kane threw open the door. He stood staring. Behind him Shartel emitted a gasp of surprise.

"Gone!" he breathed against Kane's neck. "The cussed thing's gone!"

"What are you going to ride now?" Kane jeered.

These were close quarters for Shartel. Since day was about to dawn, he needed a car more than he had needed it before. In the dark, he might safely have fled on horseback, but he could scarcely do so with sunlight flooding the country. He seemed to be faced with another day of hiding out.

He stood looking at Kane, his brain working with the rapidity of the brain of a criminal at bay. Then a criminal's cunning gave him an inspiration.

"The day is near," he said. Kane could not understand his exultation, seemingly

born of that fact. "It won't be safe for me in this here country in daylight, so you'll just take me into yore house an' keep me there. Nobody'll ever dream of lookin' for me under yore roof. I can hide there, well fed and pertected, till night comes, an' then we'll try again to git out of the county. Come on!"

There was a limit to the former deputy's endurance, even for his wife's sake. He stepped back a little, his body tense.

"I'll not take you where my wife is again," he said.

"Won't you?" Shartel jeered. "Won't you, though! Well, all right! I'll just bash yore head in. Then I'll carry you up to the house, an' she can have the pleasure of nursin' you through the day, while she waits on me. I'll lay you out, you skunk, an' then, while yo're laid up, me an' her will come to terms!"

The last vestige of self-control was gone from Kane. He stooped and tried to spring under Shartel's gun. The outlaw, from long experience in tight places, was prepared for just such a move. The gun in his right hand came smartly down on the back of Kane's head. Instead of grappling Shartel about the knees, Kane plunged against him and dropped prone.

The convict stood looking down at Kane, with a grin on his face. Then he stooped and gathered up the inert body, holstering his guns before he did so.

Kane lay quietly, with closed eyes. He was not completely unconscious. There had been an instant of roaring in his head, an instant of downfalling blackness; but the black cloud held off, and left him in a gray mist. He could barely have seen if he had opened his eyes, but he was conscious of motion as Shartel bore him to the house.

Exerting all his will, he fought to lift his brain to steadiness. By the time they reached the back door, he had at least partly succeeded.

Shartel released a hand and knocked on the door casing. The echo resounded within, but there was no answering step. Besie failed to come running to the door, as the convict had expected she would do.

An oath escaped his lips. He looked down at Kane, still quiet in his arms.

"Cuss her!" Shartel said. "Is she tryin' to trick me? Has she got somethin' up her sleeve?"

He thought now, too late, of the gun in

the dresser drawer. He lamented that he had forgotten that. It created a ticklish situation. In the house there might be an armed and angry woman to deal with.

Raising his hand, he slapped Kane sharply in the face. The former deputy was almost normal by now. With an oath, he rolled out of Shartel's arms and dropped to his feet. Dizzily he made as if to rush in on the outlaw. Shartel's two guns were instantly leveled at him.

"If it's the show-down, let it be," he grated. "Here's the daylight, an' I'm hemmed in. Daylight always brings more of them accursed man hunters. Stop where you are, mister, or I'll drill you!"

Kane stopped. He knew Shartel would do what he said. The outlaw had his back to the wall.

The fact gave Kane a little glow of satisfaction. At least, Shartel had not got away from him in the night. Sending his car against the bowlder had made for that much delay, at any rate.

"Git around to one of them windows in the living room," Shartel ordered. "Call to yore wife, an' tell her yo're a dead man if she tries any tricks. Git goin'!"

Kane led the way around the corner of the house. They came up to the window. The householder looked at the screen, and a triumphant laugh broke from him. Shartel swore.

"My wife's gone, Shartel," Kane said, turning and leaning back against the house. "She's got out of this window and went off in the other car. You can see that, can't you? She's outwitted you. Posses! By the Lord, you'll have posses on your trail now!"

"Stand aside," said Shartel thickly.

Kane stood aside. The outlaw seized the screen and tore it from its upper fastenings. Then he raised the window.

"That proves she's gone," Kane said. "The window was fastened on the inside when we left."

"Stand back a piece," Shartel directed.

Kane stepped back. Shartel menaced him with the gun for a moment, and then he turned swiftly and leaped through the window.

"Come on in here," he said, pointing the gun at Kane.

The former deputy followed him through the window.

Kane's heart was light now. Bessie was gone. She was out of harm's way. The

friendly day had dawned. Escape for Shartel would be almost impossible. If Kane lost his own life, the sheriff and the other men would surely know that he had had the courage to front Shartel at the last, unarmed though he was. When they found his body, wherever it might be, they would discover that he had died without a gun in his hand. The smashed automobile would be mute evidence that he had delayed Shartel's flight until the outlaw could be caught.

"Take them keys and hustle through the house," Shartel said. "I want to make sure that woman ain't here."

They ran through the lower floors, Shartel always just behind Kane with his prod-ding guns, and then they went up the stairs. Bessie was not in the house.

Downstairs, Shartel paused in the living room. The frown of heavy, slow thought was between his eyes.

"We got to git out of here," he said. "That woman of yores has had time to git almost any place. Them fellas may be slow in coming here, but I can't risk it. In time a hundred men will be surroundin' this house. We got to git goin'. How many hosses you got, fella?"

"Three," said Kane promptly. "Good ones, too."

He was glad that Shartel had decided to take to the open. He did not know what course Bessie would pursue. She might get in touch with the sheriff, and the sheriff might send men over the country. It was barely possible that Bessie would return to the house alone. The sooner he and Shartel left, the safer Bessie would be.

"Come on to the barn," Shartel said. "You throw saddles on two of them hosses, an' we'll get out of here. Looka here, fella, it's the show-down. You lead me out of here, or you git yore dose of lead. Take yore choice!"

"I've chosen," said Kane grimly.

## VIII

"Yo're mighty willin' all of a sudden," Shartel said suspiciously. "I got a notion yo're plannin' to double-cross me somehow. You better not!"

Kane looked into the frowning face of the big outlaw. His own countenance was twisted, lip and brow, with a frown as ugly as Shartel's.

"Why, certainly I'm planning to double-cross you," Kane said. "What do you think? Think I won't turn you in if I get



a chance? What do you take me for, you yellow cur?"

"Yo're talkin' big," Shartel said uneasily. "What's happened that's give you yore nerve all of a sudden?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Kane retorted.

Shartel suddenly thrust one of his guns into the pit of Kane's stomach.

"I've a notion to drill you right now!" he grated.

Kane experienced a quiver up and down his spine. He did not think Shartel would kill him just yet, but he knew that what an angered, uncontrolled man would do was problematical, at the best. However, he had to run his bluff through.

"Oh, you're not going to drill me," he said quietly. "You can't afford to. You need me. You don't know this country, and I do. You're just as likely to take the wrong way as the right one. Besides, as you said, the boys will give you the rope, if you kill me."

Shartel snarled into Kane's face. He stood for a moment, thinking deeply. Then he caught an idea out of what Kane had said.

"We'll waste a couple more minutes while you tell me where yo're goin'," he said. "That remark of yores about me not knowing the country was first-rate. You take a pencil and paper, and show me how you can get me out of here safe. Be cussed quick about it, too!"

Kane could feel his blood grow hot with hope. He had all he could do to keep the fierce glow from showing in his face. He could have laughed. Shartel had made a request that would work against him in the end, if any one came to the house seeking the outlaw.

"You've got to have a diagram, have you?" he sneered. "Well, I reckon I'll have to show you."

He sat down at the table and took up pencil and paper. With the pencil he made a circle in the upper right-hand corner of the sheet.

"Here's where we are," he said. "The river is right here. We can ride up that road we took, and—"

"We won't ride up that road," Shartel said. "That cussed farmer may have said somethin' about meetin' you an' another man, an' that road may be full of men lookin' for us. They'll be comin' this way before long, if that farmer met anybody.

Them lonely guys can't talk fast enough if they meet up with anybody. We'll take another way."

"Well, the river is right here," said Kane patiently. "It hasn't flowed away in the last twenty seconds. We can turn in the other direction. That takes us to a road here. Then we turn off into the hills on a trail I know. We ride like this, and come to the river. You can steal a boat and get over into Arkansas. Then the game will be in your own hands."

"Yeh, a boat!" Shartel jeered. "I see myself rowing a boat through three counties! I've seen men try to escape in boats before, an' somebody picks 'em off from the shore. I'll ride the hoss till he drops, an' then I'll steal another. You'll keep along with me till I tell you to turn back—if I let you turn back at all. Come on!"

"Very well," said Kane.

He crumpled up the piece of paper and tossed it on the table. He rose quickly and started for the door. Shartel followed him, paying no attention to the paper.

Kane grinned as he walked ahead of the outlaw. While Shartel was speaking, he had drawn lines from circle to circle on the sheet. Along one line he had written "Pope Road," and on along another "trail to river." If any one came to the house and found the paper, it would show in what direction Kane had led the escaped convict. Shartel was keen in a rough way, but he had not been keen enough to understand that the paper might betray him. He was too much worried about the plight in which he now found himself to consider what looked like an utterly insignificant matter.

In five minutes the two men were riding briskly up the road that Kane had indicated on his rude map. The sun was above the horizon now, and already it gave promise of an exceedingly hot day. The light shone into the men's faces. They drew their hats over their eyes, and rode on.

They met only one car before they came to the trail. Kane did not know the occupant of the vehicle, and the stranger did not look at the two men. As a precautionary measure, however, Shartel rode alongside Kane, so that the former deputy's horse was between his and the car.

When they came to the head of the trail, Kane pulled up his horse.

"What you stoppin' here for?" Shartel demanded.

"This is the trail," Kane answered. "I'm giving you a chance to look at it and see how you like it. It's hard riding. I reckon you're some soft for the saddle, ain't you?"

"Never mind about me bein' soft," Shartel retorted. "I'll follow you. This don't look like much of a trail to me. You lead-in me into somethin', fella?"

"If I can," Kane replied cheerfully. "The trail is here, all right. You couldn't have found it by yourself. It's overgrown for a little way, and it's not much of a trail after you hit it. You'll have to be a pretty good horseman to negotiate it."

"I kin ride any trail you kin," Shartel said. "Git goin'!"

Kane put his horse through the bushes that grew at the roadside, and Shartel followed him. For a hundred yards they rode through bushes up to the horses' bellies.

Kane was riding a horse which he had raised himself, and he had taught the animal some tricks. He made it dance along, swerving from side to side, so that the bushes were trampled for a width of three feet. He was leaving a trail that pursuers could not miss. If only one of the searchers would go to the house and find that map!

"What you pullin' off?" Shartel asked. "Can't you handle that hoss? You talk about me bein' saddle soft, an' about a man havin' to know how to ride. You handle that hoss like you was doin' stunts in a circus. Come off, now! Pull him down, an' git goin'!"

Kane pulled the horse down, and the animal went along sedately.

"You must be feelin' good," Shartel grumbled, with a return of his uneasiness. "Yo're playin' a hunch of some kind, but you better remember I'm the guy with the guns!"

Kane glanced back at the outlaw. His face was pale, and there were beads of sweat on it. He looked very tired. Months in prison had made him not only saddle soft, but soft for any kind of continued exertion.

Kane had another hunch. Perhaps he would be able to wear the big man down. A sudden attack of illness from the heat and exertion was not impossible. He would keep Shartel traveling as long as possible.

The trail now wound away among the trees. It had been made of old by countless cattle on their way to the river, but

the cattle were gone now, and second-growth stuff had sprung up rapidly in the fecund soil.

Kane took advantage of this. After traveling for half a mile, he stopped. He knew precisely where the trail went, but he was sure that Shartel could not discern it. To the unpracticed eye they stood amid pathless woods, and one direction was as good as another for traveling.

"Well, what is it?" Shartel asked in a husky voice.

"You're getting tired," Kane said, turning in his saddle and looking back. "Don't you want to rest a while? You'll wear yourself out."

"Never you mind about me wearin' out," Shartel cried furiously. "You git goin' again, an' keep at it! Which way does this cussed trail lead?"

Without a word Kane turned his horse to the right. The animal danced through the brushwood, trampling it. Shartel followed, an anxious, questioning look in his eyes. They went on for a short distance. Then Shartel sent his horse up alongside Kane's, and once more thrust his gun into Kane's ribs.

"Cuss you!" the outlaw rasped. "Yo're circlin' back, or tryin' to. You think you can fool me? Look at that sun above the trees. Yo're comin' around into it, an' we been ridin' away from it since we come in here. Yo're tryin' to git me back on the road. Yo're trampin' them bushes to leave markin's for anybody follerin' us. Now, you turn back an' keep that sun behind us!" He raised his voice. "Cuss you, you better not make no more plays like that! I *am* gittin' tired. I been locked away from light an' air for some centuries, seems like, an' I ain't the man I will be when I've been out a couple of months. Yo're gittin' me to the end of my patience. I can drill you an' go on by myself. You can take yore choice. It's my last word!"

Kane knew that this was truth born of desperation. He would have to obey Shartel in every particular from now on. He had played the man as far as he could.

"All right, Shartel," he said. "I've been stringing you some, but I'll lead to the river now. It's not far."

"Go on, then!" Shartel grunted.

They went on, Kane still in the lead. At times the going was so rough that they had to walk the horses. Once in a while they could run for a short distance.

On the way, Kane was thinking hard. He was considering the exhaustion which was evidently coming upon Shartel. The man would have to rest before long. At any time he might droop in his saddle, and his head might go to his chest for an instant. Kane knew he must be ready for that instant. He would need no more to throw himself on the outlaw.

"How much farther?" Shartel asked, after a while. "I'm dried up. I got to have water. You got to remember I been on my feet for a long time, hustlin' ahead of them cussed man hunters. I'd like to kill a bunch of 'em!"

"We'll be at the river in a minute or two," Kane said. "Then you can drink your fill."

As he spoke, he looked back at Shartel. The outlaw was staring at him with eyes which weariness had inflamed till no white showed. Deep lines had come into the man's face. Its prison pallor was unrelieved by any touch of color. Even the lips were blue.

"I know what yo're thinkin'," Shartel said. "Yo're thinkin' that you'll jump me when I kneel down to drink. Well, I'll have an eye on you! You can't git me, fella—no use in yore tryin'!"

His voice was a mumble. Kane knew that he was going light-headed, like a man lost in a desert and borne down by heat, thirst, and weary, unending travel.

Under Kane's eyes, however, the outlaw shook his head and raised it.

"I'm all right," he declared, as if Kane had voiced thoughts about his condition. "Don't you worry about me! A little water will straighten me out."

As he spoke, the river appeared before them among the trees.

"Ah!" cried Shartel, the exclamation coming huskily from a dry throat.

Kane rode down to the water's edge.

"Git off yore horse," Shartel ordered, and, as Kane obeyed, he added: "Walk along the bank five paces, an' no more. Then stand there with your back to me. Don't you move!"

Kane had to obey the outlaw, for he had both guns in his hands.

When Kane had taken his position, Shartel put the guns down within easy reach, knelt, and sucked in a mouthful of water. Then he raised his head and let the water trickle down his throat, keeping his eyes on Kane's back.

"I'm watchin' you, fella!" he called. "I take one gulp quick as a snake strikes, an' then I look at you. You needn't try to play no hunch. My guns is right by my hand!"

"I'm waiting for a drink myself," Kane said. "It might occur to you that I'm thirsty, too."

"You'll git a drink when I've had my fill," Shartel retorted. "I don't aim to fill my stomach all of a sudden, an' make myself sick."

His voice, Kane noted, was already stronger. The water was reviving him. He would be able to fight back his weakness for a space.

"Now," he said presently, "I'm goin' to souse my face an' head. When I git that done, you can walk down where you are an' drink my wash water. I hope it poisons you!"

"It probably would, if I drank it," Kane remarked.

"Well, help yoreself," Shartel invited.

Kane turned about. Shartel was drying his hands on a red handkerchief. His face was not so drawn. He seemed to have reservoirs of strength which the reviving effect of a drink of water had enabled him to tap.

Kane waited till the current had flowed past him for a moment, for he had no intention of drinking Shartel's wash water. Then he knelt and drank.

As he rose, he saw that Shartel had sat down. He held his guns in his hands, and his face was toward Kane.

"We'll rest for fifteen minutes," the outlaw said. "I can't afford to git beat out. I was beginnin' to waver in the saddle a minute ago. You needn't take no hope from that, though, fella! I'll be as good as new at the end of the fifteen minutes. You can squat down there an' think yore own thoughts."

Kane sat down. Shartel relaxed. Kane saw that he had been hunted so often that he had learned the secret of bringing back his strength by a few moments of complete rest. His eyes were half lidded, but Kane knew that he was watching closely. The former deputy could make no move just yet.

However, he could bide his time. The sun would be higher presently, and the heat would increase. After a while, as they plodded along, a thermometer would register up toward ninety-five. There would

be no breeze. A brazen sun would burn in a cloudless sky of intense blue. They had no food.

Two or three hours' riding would find Shartel at the end of his strength, Kane was sure. If he husbanded his own strength, as he would surely try to do, he might overcome the outlaw by one sudden onslaught. He thrilled to that thought. If he could lead Shartel back to the sheriff, he would make Ledbetter eat dirt!

After a while Shartel got stiffly to his feet. Kane made a move toward his own horse, but Shartel menaced him with the guns.

"Stay where you are till I mount," he rasped. "Yo're altogether too previous!"

Kane stood still. Shartel holstered one gun and held the other in his right hand. He climbed laboriously into the saddle. Backing his horse, he stopped it ten feet from Kane's.

"Now, you can get into yore saddle," Shartel said.

Kane mounted.

"We'll go along the river, shall we?" he asked pleasantly.

"Certainly we'll go along the river," Shartel flamed. "What in blazes do you think we come down here for? An' you keep that sun right where it is now. If you go to circlin', I'll plug you. I can git along by myself now."

"We'll be traveling southeast if we keep to the river," Kane retorted. "I can't keep the sun exactly where it is. I'm not the manager of the sun!"

A bellow of rage came from Shartel. Kane saw him strike his horse with his heels. Weariness and anxiety had exhausted the outlaw's self-control, and Kane's taunts had snapped his temper off short.

The former deputy saw Shartel's horse lunge toward him. He thought the convict meant to kill him now. He struck his own horse, and swerved it to one side.

Shartel appeared not to have expected this move. He fired just as Kane's horse swerved, and the bullet flew past its rider. Then the two animals were alongside each other.

The shot had startled Shartel's horse, and the animal, all along suspicious of its new rider, jumped to one side. Shartel's gun hand went to the saddle horn. Kane bore in on him, and, reaching out, struck him on the forearm. The gun fell to the river bank.

The horses came together. Shartel swung around with his left hand, and the blow caught Kane on the mouth. He was thrown back in his saddle.

Strengthened by anger, the outlaw threw himself from his own saddle. His horse, trembling, backed away. Shartel picked up the gun.

Kane drove his horse at the outlaw as the latter was about to come up with the gun in his hand. Shartel threw an arm over his face and dodged to one side, still in a stooping position. Kane's horse sprang past him, but came about swiftly in response to its rider's pull.

For a fraction of time the horseman and the man on foot faced each other. Kane's eyes were on Shartel's. He was waiting for the signal in those eyes which would mean that the outlaw was going to fling up his hand and fire. At the first hint of that, Kane was prepared to drop down behind his horse. He knew he had little chance; he could only do his best.

Shartel did not at once make a hostile move. Kane, however, took no hope from that, for he knew that Shartel, as many killers will do, was enjoying his deadly moment before he slew.

The outlaw's lips were drawn back from his ugly teeth. A little blood had somehow struggled into his face, and was dyeing it with uneven splotches of color. It was not the twist of the thick, cruel lips that sent a shiver through Kane. It was the expression in the small eyes.

If those eyes had been full of fire, Kane would not have been surprised. It was what he expected; but they did not blaze. They were cool, and the inflamed look had gone out of them. Shartel, slayer of men, was finding a sweet, smooth pleasure in his contemplation of this man whom he was about to kill. His eyes held such a look as a normal man's would have held if they had gazed on some beautiful sight.

"You prayin', fella?" the outlaw asked.

Kane said nothing. He still awaited that signal; and at length it came. Slowly the killer's eyes seemed to grow darker. They widened to their full extent. His lips drew together in a straight line. His face hardened, and the color went out of it. Shartel leaned forward, and his body drew together till he was crouching. His eyes began to flame.

Kane dropped swiftly from the saddle, putting his horse between him and the out-



law. There was a shot—then a second, a third. No bullets went past Kane.

He peered across his horse. Shartel was standing where he had been, but his gun hand was down. His left hand clutched at his side, and blood was trickling through his fingers.

While Kane watched him, he tried to hold himself erect. He tried to lift his head. He tried to bring up the hand that held the gun; but he could not do it. Slowly his knees buckled—slowly, then swiftly. He crashed down, as a giant tree crashes after its first slow leaning when the last severing blow is struck.

Kane ran around his horse and looked down at the fallen man.

For a few seconds Shartel lay still. Then he lifted his head. He had dropped his gun, but it had fallen near him. His fingers crept to it, and tightened around the butt. He raised himself with his left hand, but his arm could not sustain his weight. He dropped back. He tried to raise his gun hand, but failed.

He would not give up, however. His glazed eyes looked out from his face as he turned it from side to side, trying to locate Kane. Then, with a great effort, he brought his left arm around in front of him, and took hold of his right forearm with his left hand. Kane knew that he was attempting to prop up his right hand in an effort to shoot.

The former deputy sprang forward, plucked the gun from Shartel's hand, and removed the other guns from his holster and his pockets. The outlaw rolled over on his back, and Kane thought he would die then and there; but he did not. His lips moved. Kane bent down to catch the low words.

"Shoot me, fella!" muttered Shartel. "I know yo're goin' to do it, so be quick about it!"

Kane knelt beside the wounded man and began to uncover his wound. As he did so, three shots, close together, rang out in the distance. Kane fired three shots into the air from a fully loaded gun. Then he went to work on Shartel's wound.

## IX

ONLY one of three shots fired at Shartel had taken effect, and Kane could not tell whether the wound was going to be fatal or not. The outlaw was still breathing, and he seemed to be dimly conscious. He did

not speak, but his eyes clung to Kane's face and moved as Kane moved his head.

Pulling back the man's shirt, Kane discovered a hole in his right side, just below the shoulder. Shartel's heart was safe, anyhow; the question was whether the bullet had gone through the right lung. Kane could not tell about that.

Gently he rolled the outlaw on his side, and uncovered his back. There was no wound there. The bullet had not come through.

Kane restored Shartel to his former position on his back, and found that blood was issuing afresh from the wound. With a clean handkerchief he stanching the flow as well as he could. Then he went down to the river, and filled his hat with water. After he had moistened Shartel's lips, he managed to get him to take a couple of swallows, and bathed the wounded man's face and chest.

Shartel's eyes opened to the full, and his lips moved.

"Who killed me?" he asked, as Kane bent down to catch the whispered words.

"You're not dead yet," Kane said. "We'll get you to a doctor. There's help in the neighborhood. I'll see if I can get some of the boys headed this way."

He emptied his gun in the air, and was immediately answered by three more shots, nearer at hand than the first three had been. Kane stood erect, cupped his hands, and yelled at the top of his lungs. An answering shout came from among the trees to his left.

Kane kept on shouting at intervals, and presently three men emerged from the woods a short distance down the stream. Catching sight of Kane, they quickened their steps and came up to him. They looked at him curiously, and then glanced down at Shartel.

"Shot him, did you, Kane?" one of them asked.

Kane knew, from the coldness in the speaker's tone, that he had heard of the former deputy's refusal to join in the man hunt. Kane's face flushed. He drew himself up.

"Why, no—no, I didn't shoot him," he answered.

"You didn't? Who did?"

"Dog-goned if I know," Kane said. "He was just going to plug me when somebody fired from among the trees, and he went down with a bullet in his chest."

These were big men and rough. They were courageous, and they had felt a kind of vicarious shame when they learned that Kane had refused to join them. Moreover, they were incapable of receiving a fairy tale without question. The story that Kane was telling seemed incredible. Here he was with a gun in his hand, and a wounded man lay at his feet. It was as neat a two-and-two as a straight-thinking man could ask for.

One of the three men stepped beyond the other two and ranged himself at Kane's side, his eyes on Shartel's upturned face. Kane knew this man. He was a farmer from up the river—a man of good repute, fearless, honest.

"How come you're here with this fella, Kane?" he asked.

"He had a gun on me till he got that wound in his chest," Kane answered. "He came to my house in the night, and held up me and my wife. He made me take him away in one of my cars, at first, but I fooled him on that. Then he made me saddle two horses and ride down here with him. Why are you looking at me like that, Wilson?"

Wilson was regarding the former deputy with cold, speculative eyes. His lips curled slightly before he spoke.

"I dunno if you've heard it or not, Kane," he said, "but the sheriff appointed me to take your place when you throwed up your job. I'm a deputy."

His eyes challenged Kane as he uttered the last sentence, as if the statement had more meaning than it appeared to have on the face of it. Kane was puzzled.

"Why, that's all right," he said. "I'm glad you got the job, if you wanted it. Since you're an officer and I'm not any more, you can take charge here."

He stepped back, as if by that action he gave way to Wilson.

In spite of the gun in Kane's hand, Wilson drew his own gun. It was a nervy thing to do, for Wilson was not fast on the draw. He had thick hands and stubby fingers. If Kane's own gun had been holstered, he could have drawn it and shot Wilson while the man's hand was moving toward his weapon; but Kane did not attempt to lift his gun hand. The deputy covered him.

"Keep your hand down! Turn your gun around and hand it to me, butt first," he ordered.

"The gun's empty," Kane said.

"Do what I say!"

Kane had a notion to disobey. He didn't like Wilson's tone. What was the man's suspicion, anyhow? However, he instantly thought better of his fleeting impulse, and handed over the gun, butt first.

Wilson dropped it into his pocket. Then he knelt beside Shartel.

"Plugged bad, all right," he said, rising. He turned to one of the other men. "Go get the horses," he ordered. "We'll have to get this guy to a doctor. He's entitled to medical attention, no matter what he is or has done."

The man ran along the river and disappeared among the trees. Wilson still kept his eyes on Kane.

"You're under arrest, Kane," he said.

"Under arrest?" Kane repeated.

"What for?"

"I dunno what the charge will be. The sheriff can decide about that. I don't like the looks of this thing. You refuse to join in the hunt for this guy, and then you appear with him here all of a sudden. You have an empty gun in your hand. This guy has a bullet in him. It don't look good to me!"

"Ever see a six gun?" Kane asked.

"Why, I'm packin' a couple of 'em—three, with yours."

"Oh, is mine a six gun?"

Wilson, with a rather stupid look on his face, drew Kane's gun from his pocket and stared at it.

"Sure, it's a six gun," he said.

"How many shots did you hear altogether?" Kane asked.

Wilson took off his hat and scratched his head. He looked blank.

"Lemme see," he said. "Why, they was several shots, an' then three together, an' then three shots more in answer to ours."

"Six, all told, of the grouped shots, and all from that gun," Kane said. He drew another gun from his pocket. "Here's the second gun Shartel had," he went on. "He tried to kill me with it. You can add it to your collection. Use your noddle a little, Wilson!"

"Who in heck shot this guy, then?" Wilson queried.

"I don't know," Kane answered.

"Where did you boys come from? Have you been up to my house?"

"No—the sheriff got a message that you an' this fella was headed in another direc-

tion, an' he told me to take these two boys and lope this way. I thought mebbe you'd be hittin' for the river."

"Who was that message from?" Kane asked.

"The sheriff didn't say."

"I left a map—" Kane began.

He broke off abruptly. His eyes swept to the trees from among which the bullets had come. Suddenly his face whitened. He turned and ran toward the trees.

"Hey, you!" Wilson called. "Where you think you're goin'? Come back here, or I'll put a slug into you!"

Kane, halfway to the trees, wheeled on the deputy. His eyes were blazing. Sometimes, he saw, an honest man could be terribly stupid.

"I'm not running away," he cried. "Come after me. Keep me covered, if you like, but don't stop me!"

He broke and sped in among the trees. Wilson lumbered after him.

The deputy had not taken more than a score of steps when he came upon a strange sight. Kane was kneeling, and on his knee rested the head of a young and beautiful woman. She was limp; her face was white; her disordered hair fell about her shoulders. Kane, man hunter of the past, was entreating his beloved wife to speak to him.

Wilson took off his hat, went forward, and knelt beside Bessie, opposite to Kane.

"Don't say she's dead!" the deputy whispered.

"No, not dead," Kane said. "Just fainted. She must have shot Shartel and then gone down in a heap. Get some water, Wilson!"

Wilson ran toward the river.

"My gosh!" he muttered, as if it were past all believing. "I understood that girl was a soft kind of woman. Folks been sayin' she wouldn't last out here—that she'd be stringing Kane back East with her before long. My gosh! Her soft!"

## X

MRS. THOMAS KANE lay curled up on the big davenport in the living room of her husband's bungalow. Kane, anxious and fluttering, sat beside her, watching her.

The boys had taken Shartel back to town. Kane had brought Bessie home, after the water had slowly revived her. He had found her horse near by, and she had insisted on riding it, with a return of strength and courage which amazed Kane.

However, when they reached the barn, she had swayed in the saddle, and her husband had caught her just in time. She was in a dead faint again.

She had revived once more when Kane bathed her face and hands. After that he heated coffee on the oil stove, and she gulped it, hot and strong. She had wanted to talk immediately, but hitherto Kane had not permitted her to speak.

"Rest," he said. "Just rest. Everything's all right."

Five more minutes passed while Kane fluttered and waited. At the end of that time Bessie sat up tentatively. For a while her head whirled, but she continued in her sitting position. At length she slipped her feet to the floor and sat up straight. She managed to favor her husband with a wan smile.

"There!" she said. "You see I'm quite myself again, Tom."

Kane took her hands in his big brown ones, and held them close.

"You've had a fierce time!" he said.

"See if you can fix the phone," she said.

"I tried, but I didn't know how the wires went together where that—that man broke them."

Kane went to the phone and examined it. He was no electrician, but he saw where Shartel's pull had broken the wires. Loose ends protruded from the cord and from the outlet. With his knife he pried up the latter ends, and fastened them to the ends in the cord. He took down the receiver.

"A minute," he said, and to his wife: "Here's the exchange girl. It's working."

"Call the sheriff's office, and see if—if Shartel is—is going to die," she whispered.

Kane put in the call, his eyes on his wife's face. It was very pale again, and her hands were gripping the edge of the davenport. Kane got the sheriff's office, put his question, got a brief answer, and hung up.

"No," he said. "He isn't going to die. Sheriff tells me the doctor says the bullet didn't hit his lung. It's buried in him some place, and will stay there. He'll be in bed for a few days, and then he'll be taken back to the penitentiary."

"Why, can he live with a bullet in him?" Bessie asked anxiously.

"Sure!" Kane answered heartily. "Lots of better men than he is have done that."

Bessie began to waver again. Kane sprang to her side and put his arms about

her. She turned her face to his shoulder and began to cry.

"Don't, Bessie!" Kane pleaded. "Don't do that!"

But she cried steadily for some time. Then she straightened up and dried her eyes.

"I feel better now," she said. "I'll tell you what happened."

"No, you rest some more. You're not in shape to talk."

"Yes, I am," Bessie said. "I want to tell you and have done with it. Then we'll forget all about it."

"You certainly go from strong to weak, and back again, faster than anybody I ever saw," declared Kane. "Tell me, if it'll make you feel better."

"After you and Shartel left the first time, I got out of the window," Bessie said. "I took the other car, and rode over to the Mannings'. From there I phoned to the sheriff. I didn't know where you had gone, of course, and couldn't tell him much, but he said he would start some men out this way. When I got back to the house, I think you must have just left. I knew you had been here, because the doors were unlocked. While I stood staring about the room, wondering what I could do, I caught sight of a scrap of paper crumpled up on the table. I knew it hadn't been there when I left, for I straightened up that table only yesterday. I opened the piece of paper, and found your map. Then I tried to fix the phone, but I couldn't. I knew just where you had gone, for you and I rode to the river over that trail a few weeks ago, you remember. For a few minutes more—perhaps it was only one minute—I still didn't know what to do. Then I remembered about that old gun upstairs. I went up and got it. It was awfully big and dangerous-looking when I took it out of the drawer, but I knew I mustn't think about that. Then I went out, saddled my horse, and rode after you. When I was a little way from the river, I dismounted and went to the edge of the trees on foot. I—I saw that Shartel was trying to kill you."

She closed her eyes, shivering.

"Then you shot Shartel," Kane finished for her.

"I shot Shartel," she said. "Oh, it seemed a long, long time before I could get my hand up with the gun in it! I knew I might kill him, and I didn't know how I could do that. I had to say to myself sev-

eral times that I must shoot—that I must save you. Finally I fired, and I knew I'd hit Shartel. I fired again, but I guess the other shots must have gone up into the sky, my hand was shaking so. They didn't hit Shartel. It's a wonder one of them didn't hit you. It took the last ounce of my courage to pull that trigger once. When I had fired twice more, I threw the gun as far away as I could, and turned and ran. I was all befuddled. Then I tumbled down, and didn't know any more until I found I was with you."

Without the sound of a sob she began to cry again, her tears flooding her eyes and flowing down her cheeks. Kane picked her up and put her down on the couch.

"Now you rest," he said. "Let's forget this thing!"

The phone rang. Kane answered it. He spoke not at all, only nodding. He turned about to his wife, smiling broadly.

"That was the sheriff," he said. "He told me to present his compliments to you, and he wanted to know if he could come up to supper some night. He said you were a brave little lady, and he was for you all along the line. He told you not to worry about Shartel's dying. Shartel, he said, has begun to curse, and will curse himself well before long. So, you see, Mrs. Thomas, you are standing well with that limb of the law!"

"That's nice," Bessie said. "And what did he say to you for yourself? Did he apologize for what he said last night?"

"He said I was a miserable skunk, no good, not worth bothering about, and no fit companion for decent human beings. He said he didn't see how you could put up with me. He said I was too low down and yellow to be—"

Mrs. Thomas Kane's feet came down on the floor with a bang as she came to an erect position. She looked at her husband with blazing eyes.

"Thomas, you go and saddle a horse, ride down to that sheriff's office, and make him apologize to you for what he just said and for what he said before. Why, if he talks like that, everybody will talk the same way! I won't have it. You go and *make* him apologize, Thomas!"

Mr. Thomas Kane began to laugh. He laughed and laughed, while his wife stared at him. Weakly he dropped into a chair and hid his face in his arms, while his big body rocked.



"Well, I'd like to know what that's about!" Bessie said acidly.

Kane lifted a red face and mopped his brow.

"Honey," he said, "I don't have to *make* the sheriff apologize. He's done apologized already. *That* was an apology!"

"Apology?" Bessie murmured. "It's the funniest apology I ever heard of!"

"Well, you couldn't expect a sheriff to come down off his high horse and say, 'Please forgive me for what I said, Mr. Kane.' That ain't the style among men out here—not for sheriffs or for anybody else. The sheriff just kind of twisted things around and unloosed himself that way to let me know he had made a mistake and was sorry."

"Well," said Mrs. Kane, "then I suppose his compliments to me can be twisted

around to mean just the opposite. He was scorning me, was he?"

"Scorning you?" said Kane. "No, ma'am. He knows better 'n that. He knows that when he talks to you, from now on, he's got to give you straight talk. He meant every word he said. It came straight from his heart. He knew he'd better get that line of talk in for you brisk and fast. Otherwise, first time I met him, I'd have knocked his head clean off his shoulders. That sheriff will be your best friend from now on, honey. Every time he sees you, he'll come clean across the street to inquire how you are."

"Won't I be honored, though?" said Mrs. Thomas Kane.

Though her tone was a little dry, her husband noticed that her face held a sort of pleased look.

THE END

### BALLADE OF THE LIVING FACE

So much, so fair, has fled away!

Time gives, then takes it all again—

Faces that smiled yet might not stay,

Heart against heart held close in vain,

Shadows and dreams that scarce remain

And greet me with a phantom smile,

Lost voices in the autumn rain.

Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

Life's morning turns to evening gray;

Gone are the heights, the level plain

Slopes toward the ending of the day,

With far-off music like some strain

From lands of lovely joy and pain;

And I upon a lonely isle

Feed with old thoughts my lonely brain.

Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

A little longer let me lay

My head betwixt these blossoms twain,

Like April nestling close to May!

Let me a little longer feign

The cup is full and still to drain,

That I the shadow may beguile,

And courage 'gainst the dark sustain!

Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

ENVOI

Belovéd, thus my loss turns gain,

And I forget the long exile;

Ah, weary not of my refrain—

Ah, living face, stay yet awhile!

Richard Le Gallienne

# Poison Ivy

A STORY OF THE GOOD AND EVIL IN THE LIFE OF A SMALL AMERICAN TOWN

By Louis Lacy Stevenson

Author of "Big Game," etc.

UNIONVILLE'S best residences were well up on the hill that gradually rose from the river. In that locality large, square brick houses faced ample lawns, and great maples and elms interlaced their branches over the uneven brick sidewalks.

The judge's house stood at the top of the hill. It was a frame house, and not so spacious as some of the others near by; but it stood somewhat aloof from its neighbors, and was surrounded by a stout, high iron fence. In its severe erectness it seemed to be characteristic of the owner himself.

Well south of the square, down by the river, the dwellings were mean. "Nobody lived there," in the expression of the hill, though the river bank had a considerable population. It was not exactly a pleasant place of abode, for the stream, merely a trickle in the hot months, was a raging, yellow torrent in the spring, sweeping away property and marooning human beings. The waters, when they receded, left their dirty imprint on the houses about which they had swirled, and all the structures looked rusty.

Dewey, Squank, and I lived on the hill, but we spent our spare time along the banks of the river. The river boys of our own age resented our presence in their territory, and were remarkably accurate with soft mud and hard stones. Because of frequent encounters, with resultant damage to clothes and bodies, and because of an unreasonable fear of the potentialities of the river, there were parental inhibitions, but the lure of the locality overbalanced the danger of punishment.

An irresistible fascination beckoned us constantly. Our journeys were in the na-

ture of explorations of a strange and hostile land, with curious bits of flotsam—souvenirs of the spring floors—salvaged from the low-flung branches of the willows, as rewards. Then there were strange pools covered with green slime, which we held to be of great depth and inhabited by giant fish. We never verified our beliefs, however, the soft ooze of the banks discouraging such half-hearted investigations as we undertook.

Here and there clumps of willows hid pitfalls in the form of sink holes, these being depressions filled with a black, viscous mass which, boy lore said, would engulf one before help could come, no matter how near at hand it might be. It was while proceeding cautiously through one of these willow screens that we found the Snake Feeder.

Squank, who was in the lead, stopped so suddenly that Dewey and I walked on his heels.

The man was lying on his back, with his mouth open, and bluebottle flies were walking up and down his face. As he seemed oblivious to the tickling of the hairy feet of these insects, and to their stinging bite, we thought him dead, and horror froze us. When our fright had abated sufficiently to clear our vision somewhat, the regular rise and fall of his narrow chest told us that we were in error; so we stood and stared.

The skin on his face was drawn tight, and shone as if varnished. His cheek bones were so prominent that they looked like knobs in white parchment. The bones of his arms could be traced through his sleeves, and those of his legs through his trousers. He was so thin that his head seemed too large for his body. His forehead was high, his hair brown and slightly curly.

The clothing of the man was not in keeping with the place. It was obviously new, and even we could tell that it was well made. It had been pressed recently, too—a fact which made it patent that he was not a resident of Unionville. His hands, with their long, slender fingers, were so white and clean that the faint blue vein etchings showed clearly. We acquired all these details in several minutes of silent and intent study.

Drawing back a little way, boylike, we caucused on what had brought him down there. We debated what sudden disaster had caused such a wealthy man to be sleeping on the river bank with bluebottle flies crawling over his face, his head only a few inches from the muddy edge of a green-scummed pool, and his hands almost among the poison ivy vines.

The solution was advanced at last by Dewey—a simple explanation in which Squank and I concurred hurriedly, with inward regret at not having thought of it first, since such happenings were not uncommon in Unionville.

"He's drunk," was what Dewey said.

We didn't waste any further consideration on him, there being nothing wonderful in such a condition. Nor did we disturb him, our experience having been that such acts sometimes brought unpleasant consequences; but we did speculate as to whether we should tell Gabriel White.

Not that we felt any obligation to the tall, hard-built, hard-muscled, hard-bitten town marshal, whose reputation as a sleuth was great in our minds. No, he had interfered too often and too successfully with certain of our activities. While we had never quite accomplished the calaboose, Gabriel White caused us to infer that our liberty was due only to the fact that he had a heart. Doubting the existence of such an organ in his straight up-and-down frame, we felt that we owed him no great amount of loyalty.

The argument subsiding, we tiptoed back for another look, while a blue jay screamed raucously and a kingfisher abandoned the dead limb from which it had been keeping watch over a riffle.

"He's as thin as a snake feeder," said Squank, after a long survey of the recumbent man.

So the newcomer was named after those harmless but formidable-looking insects, sometimes called devil's darning needles,

which flit over ponds and pools, with heads apparently too large for their slender bodies. Later, others in Unionville saw the similarity, and in after days, when the Snake Feeder became a familiar figure around the square, there were those who called him that to his face.

We discussed the matter of a report further as we climbed the easy Main Street hill. Our attitude was entirely selfish. We were unanimous in the opinion that to herald to the law the advent of such a stranger would elevate us above our fellows, and thus give us desirable prominence.

Opposed to this was an entirely human desire for obscurity at this time. A certain badly aimed brick, which had missed its target and gone through the glass roof of Sorenson's greenhouse, had a great deal of bearing on our attitude. Revelation of this accident would certainly have unpleasant reactions in our homes.

Despite this, we wavered when we saw Gabriel White standing in the west door of the courthouse. The courthouse had once been a dignified thing of red brick and massive native stone columns; but it had been profaned—columns and all—by a coat of drab paint, now well stained by the residue of burned natural gas, as if the chimneys had endeavored to protest at the lack of artistic sense shown by those responsible for the painting.

White looked so ominous in his blue uniform, and his star gleamed so brightly, that we hurried on our way. Consequently, the introduction of the Snake Feeder to Unionville was delayed until Saturday, the day on which Unionville always had most of its dramatics.

It was on Saturday that the hitching racks around the square showed no vacant places. It was Saturday when the best runaways and fights occurred. It was on Saturday that the saloons along the South Side—a sordid row, even more drab than the courthouse at which they leered—were jammed with men whose language was profane and high-pitched, and who became more and more quarrelsome as the hour grew later.

Dewey, Squank, and I were engaged in our usual Saturday afternoon avocation, peddling bills. The work necessitated visiting all the buggies around the square. An advertisement was thrust into the rear of each vehicle, presumably to be read when the driver reached his home, but more often

to be lost along the way or ruined by what was placed upon it, the contents of jugs having a tendency to escape when the stopper is a corn cob.

We paused when we reached the center of the row along the South Side, choosing our halting place with care and discretion, experience having taught us the best point for observation.

Just as we stopped, an emaciated figure came out of the Good Luck, the largest and most ornate of the saloons. At the door he wiped his mouth with a white handkerchief, though patrons of such establishments usually used a coat sleeve or the back of a hand.

"The Snake Feeder!" exclaimed Squank.

He leaned against the iron railing that guarded the areaway. Those about him were men only, for no respectable woman ever set foot on the South Side.

As we stood there, waiting for any excitement that might be our fortune, a country woman passed from the pavement alongside the courthouse, and, working her way through the closely packed buggies, went into the street. Straight on she went, braving the profanity, the fumes of cheap tobacco, cheap liquor, and the staleness of unclean drinking places, together with the still more unclean looks and remarks, until she clutched the arm of a man.

"Go 'way!" he commanded thickly, reeling in clumsy resistance to her effort to take him from his companions.

Some one laughed, and we joined in the mirth. To us it was good comedy; but the Snake Feeder, standing in the background, didn't laugh. Instead, his face grew hard. When the woman's eyes filled with tears as she pleaded, he stepped forward, his hat in his hand.

"I believe, madam, you want your husband to accompany you?" he asked, a peculiar softness in his voice.

"Yes," she answered, her tone defiant. Then she looked into his face, and her attitude changed instantly. "We have to get home—the children are alone," she continued hurriedly. "Lew got drunk last Saturday and spent every cent he had. I had to put up the team and do the chores. He's a good man when he's sober, but last Saturday he struck—"

She was choked by tears.

"Aw, come on, Lew, le's have 'nother lil snifter!" pleaded a young fellow, catching the man's coat sleeve.

The answer was returned by the Snake Feeder, and in a manner that was astounding, for we did not believe that such a bag of bones could have so much strength. His bony fist shot out and caught the loafer under the chin. The fellow struck the bricks so hard that he lay with his legs twitching.

"Do you love your husband?" asked the Snake Feeder, calmly turning his back on his handiwork.

"Yes," she said softly, her face getting red.

"Then, by God, he'll go with you, if I have to throw him into his wagon!"

"I'll go, stranger," answered Lew, who seemed to become sober the instant the Snake Feeder turned toward him. "Come on, Emma!"

The Snake Feeder bowed and stepped back. Arm in arm, the couple crossed the street, the husband walking as straight as if he had not taken a drink that day. The Snake Feeder watched them with a curious look on his face—a look which we interpreted as sad.

Gabriel White pushed his way through the crowd that had collected.

"The Snake Feeder is going to get arrested," said Squank.

But the marshal paid no attention to the Snake Feeder. Instead, he jerked the prostrate loafer to his feet, said something to him that we could not hear, and pushed him through the crowd. The loafer couldn't have been hurt very badly, though he had a lump on his head, for he disappeared speedily.

The Snake Feeder just stood there without making a move until Lew picked up the lines and backed his team away from the rack. Then the Snake Feeder went back into the Good Luck.

Dewey, Squank, and I waited a long time, though we should have hurried our task to completion, not only to collect the quarter due to each of us, but, what was more important to us, to invest the total sum satisfactorily in fishing tackle that we had coveted for many days.

But the Snake Feeder did not reappear.

## II

THE judge was a hard man—hard as the monuments in the cemetery, my grandfather said to my Uncle Henry. Uncle Henry had come up from Cincinnati, and was sitting on the front porch with grand-



father. I was digging weeds out of the front walk.

The judge had just passed, and had returned my grandfather's greeting with a grave nod. He was not tall, but he seemed to be, and the way he walked gave an impression of power and strength. His mustache—shot freely with white, though grandfather said he was only a little past forty—was neatly stiff and unbending. He had eyes like the monuments to which my grandfather had referred—gray and cold.

The judge was the only man in Unionville who was never called by his first name. No one had ever seen the judge smile, and no one had ever seen the dignity that surrounded him ruffled in the slightest. He accepted the respect that the town gave him as his right.

"His name is Gilbert Browne," continued my grandfather, when Uncle Henry asked him a question. "He came here about fifteen years ago, from Chicago. He was just as cold and dignified then as he is now, though at first he could get only small cases; but it didn't take Unionville long to find out that he knew more law than any one else in town. His advice was always sound, and he never took a case unless he believed his client was right. The result was that one year, when there was a vacancy on the Republican ticket, he was asked to take the nomination. True, they didn't know much about him, but it looked as if the Democrats were going to make a clean sweep—this county swings one way and then another, you know—so it didn't make any real difference, the committee thought; but he was elected by a small majority, it being a Republican year, after all.

"Right after he was elected we found out one thing—he wouldn't play politics. If a man was guilty, he received the same kind of a sentence whether he was a member of the party or not. There were complaints, of course. When useful workers were sent to prison, some of the party leaders took the matter up with the judge, but they did it only once. The sentence was the same, too, whether the guilty one lived here on the hill or down by the river—generally the limit of the law."

"Pretty hard on some poor devils, wasn't it? Or has he changed?" inquired Uncle Henry.

"He hasn't changed, and Unionville doesn't look at it as you do. The judge

has been elected by a bigger majority every time he has had to run. He's as hard as emery, but he's just. At the last election even I jeopardized my standing as a Democrat by voting for him."

My uncle was silent. That was news to me, because I never thought that my grandfather could see the least good in any Republican. Indeed, the judge must be a mighty man!

I speeded up my weeding. If I could escape in time, I would find Dewey and Squank, and we would sneak into the court. The judge was going to sentence Mike Johnson that morning. Mike had knifed another man, and had submitted to arrest only after Gabriel White had broken a club over his head. I believed there would be such a crowd that we would not be observed, Gabriel White having a prejudice against boys in the court room.

"Is the judge married?" asked Uncle Henry.

"No, he doesn't seem to have any use for women," answered my grandfather. "When some poor drab comes up before him, he always sends her to the workhouse. He lives up there all alone, except for a colored housekeeper. Martha Green, the housekeeper, keeps pretty much to herself, also. There aren't many negroes here, and they stick close together, but except for going to church on Sunday she never mingles with members of her race. She's a skinny, thin-lipped woman, the blackest in town."

I surveyed the work done, and concluded I could make an escape without causing too much talk when I returned. I was just oozing out as privately as possible when I saw Charlie Mechant.

Charlie was the teller in the Union National Bank. He was slender and graceful, and his black hair was always parted just exactly right. When a new style was shown in Rosenroth's window, it was always after Charlie had ordered that same kind of a suit. He was the one who introduced the new dance steps in town. Dewey, Squank, and I thought him a sissy, but all the girls liked him.

Dewey, Squank, and I liked Tom Spiers a lot better. Tom also worked in the Union National. He and Charlie started in as bookkeepers, and Charlie had been promoted, while Tom hadn't.

That made Dewey, Squank, and me pretty mad, when we heard it. We were patrons of the Union National, depositing

ten cents a week there under the sternest kind of family compulsion, and by making almost unbelievable sacrifices. We had a big notion to transfer our accounts to the Farmers' Savings; but before taking action, we asked Tom about it.

"Well, I guess they picked the better man, boys," he said, so we left our three dollars and twenty cents apiece there.

At the same time we resolved that if we ever got a chance to help him with Nelly Miller, we would surely do so. We thought Nelly was the prettiest girl in town. She had black hair and black eyes, and when she smiled she showed white, even teeth. One time we saw her in an evening gown—a pink one with a low neck, which showed her full, rounded throat and her white skin, and I said she looked like a queen.

"I think I'll have to tell Mamie Merrill about that," said Squank, and I shut up, because I didn't like to be teased about Mamie Merrill.

Nelly Miller couldn't decide whether she preferred Charlie Mechant or Tom Spiers.

"Have you finished, boy?" asked grandfather, as I was going quietly through the gate to see what Charlie Mechant wanted.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Good!" said Charlie. "I want you to take a note to Miss Miller for me."

I was about to tell him I wouldn't do it, but he held out a dime with the envelope. As that money would save me a lot of trouble with my banking, I took it, and ran over to Nelly's house.

"No answer," she said, after she had read it; "but here's some chewing gum for you."

She was always like that.

I found Dewey and Squank, and we got into the court room without the marshal catching us. We slipped in among the crowd of men until we got to a place where we could see the judge on the bench and Mike in the pen where they kept the prisoners. He was handcuffed, and his face was twisted in an ugly scowl. On the table beside the lawyers was the big knife with which he had done the cutting. The blade was rusty, and we thought the discoloration was dried blood.

"You have been found guilty of the crime of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm," said the judge, after he had ordered Mike to stand up. "Have you anything to say in your own behalf before I pronounce sentence?"

Mike shook his shaggy head, his hard, mottled eyes on the judge.

"Five years in the State penitentiary."

Mike just stood there. Then a wicked gleam came into those hard eyes, and, before any one could move, he leaped over the low railing and grabbed the knife.

I could feel my heart in my throat, but the judge did not change color. Instead, as the man rushed toward him, he leaped to his feet and braced himself, his fists clenching. One more step, and Mike would be on him!

A terrific report tore my ears, and the knife dropped from Mike's fingers. Gabriel White had shot from the hip, but his aim was true. As he fired, he jumped, and bore the prisoner to the floor. I could not see what was happening, but it seemed only a second before Mike was back in the prisoner's box, one hand hanging limp and strangely twisted, with blood dripping from a purple hole.

Every one was tense with excitement. No, there were two cool persons—Gabriel White and the judge. The judge resumed his seat, and was as calm as if he was sitting in his pew in the First Presbyterian Church and the organ was playing. Dewey, Squank, and I were perspiring, but there were no beads on his forehead.

Men milled around, but Gabriel White quieted them. This done, he made Mike stand up once more.

"Michael Johnson," said the judge evenly, "I will amend your sentence. The limit of the law is ten years. You will serve ten years at hard labor. Officer, remove the prisoner!"

Gabriel White led Johnson out.

"If there are no further cases, court will stand adjourned for to-day," we heard the judge say, as we followed the chattering and gibbering Mike to the calaboose, where he would be held until he was taken to Columbus.

If there was any nervousness in the judge's voice, we could not detect it. We agreed that he was the bravest man in town.

We were coming back from the city prison, which was in the back of the engine house, when we saw the Snake Feeder leaving the Good Luck, and, as usual, wiping his mouth with a white handkerchief. Not yet surfeited with excitement, we followed him, memories of the encounter with the loafer uppermost in our minds.

The Snake Feeder walked as far as the courthouse fence and then stopped, leaning against the iron pickets, and looking at the South Side with an expression of contempt on his face. His breath smelled strongly of whisky, but his hands and face were clean, and when he walked he did not stagger. He only rested for a moment and then went on.

The judge, with his usual dignity, was passing through the iron gate leading from the courthouse yard to the sidewalk. Other pedestrians were giving him the right of way, that being the custom. Despite the fact that he had faced death only a few moments before, his cheeks were full of color and his step was springy.

The instant he passed through the gate, the Snake Feeder reached it, and the two men met face to face. Both stopped. The Snake Feeder smiled a mirthless smile, his thin lips drawn tightly against his teeth; but all the blood left the ruddy face of the judge, and he staggered back against a big maple tree. He seemed to go to ruin in an instant, and to shrink until the Snake Feeder towered over him.

Dewey, Squank, and I were thunderstruck at the sight. Just a little while before the judge, barehanded and unarmed, had stood straight and undaunted before the rush of a man in whose hand was a knife, and in whose eyes was murder; and now he was cowering before a mere skeleton of a man, who only smiled!

"You?" questioned the judge, after a few moments of silence, his voice husky and lacking in resonance.

"Yes, I," answered the Snake Feeder, something in his tone giving us the creeps.

With the words, his smile vanished, and in its place came hate—hate concentrated, hate that took away all humanness.

The judge's lips moved, but no words came, and he shrank back more closely against the tree.

"It's been a long search," continued the Snake Feeder, his voice cold and metallic; "but it's the end of the trail now!"

"Yes." The judge's assent was faint.

"I've been keeping alive just for one thing!"

As he said that, the Snake Feeder moved forward slightly, like a cat stalking its prey, his long, thin fingers contracting into hawk-like talons ready to clutch; and the judge seemed to grow even smaller.

"But you're too late," he croaked.

"You lie!" screamed the Snake Feeder, his arm raised to strike.

We expected to see the judge knocked down, a thing in our eyes almost as monstrous as spitting at the throne of the Almighty; but the blow did not descend. The Snake Feeder's thin arm was caught in the stout grip of Gabriel White. Roughly the town marshal jerked the Snake Feeder to one side, and spoke the order:

"Come with me"—a command that meant the calaboose.

"I'll strip that man to his dirty hide, and show this town what he really is!" shouted the Snake Feeder. "I'll—"

A fit of coughing broke his words. He strangled and became limp, red bubbles issuing from his mouth.

"Let him go, Gabriel," commanded the judge, still in that strange, strained voice.

The town marshal contemptuously half dragged, half carried, the Snake Feeder to a drinking fountain. Four of these horrible iron barbarities were firmly fastened to the four corners of the square. At one of them he washed the Snake Feeder's face with one hand, supporting the man's body with the other. Then he dashed water into the Snake Feeder's face.

The Snake Feeder did not open his eyes until the judge had been gone for several minutes.

"I'm all right now," he said, the choke gone out of his voice.

"Can you handle yourself?" Gabriel White asked.

"Certainly."

The officer released his hold, and the Snake Feeder staggered, controlled himself with an effort, and walked away slowly, his head held high, his body erect and untrembling, but his face as white as plaster.

Straight to the Good Luck he went and we saw him no more that day.

### III

AFTER supper, my father and Uncle Henry went down town to get some cigars, leaving my grandfather smoking his pipe on the front porch.

I sat on the steps, thinking of what I had seen. I couldn't think of anything else. The encounter between Judge Browne and the Snake Feeder, and its effect on the judge, had so affected Dewey, Squank, and me that we didn't talk much about it on the way home; but I felt that I must discuss it with somebody or else burst.



"Do you know the Snake Feeder, grandfather?" I asked suddenly.

"What's that?" he replied, his hand to his ear, he being a little deaf on that side. "Move over closer, boy."

"Do you know the Snake Feeder?" I repeated, sliding nearer to his chair and around on his good ear side.

"I know everybody in town, but I never heard of such a man. Who is he, and what about him?"

I told grandfather how Dewey, Squank, and I had found the Snake Feeder down on the river bank—grandfather had no objection to my prowling along the river—and about the Snake Feeder meeting the judge, and how the judge had cringed.

"Strange!" muttered grandfather, at the end of my somewhat incoherent recital. "And the judge knew the man you call the Snake Feeder?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure he did," I answered confidently, for I recalled the whiteness of the judge's face, the laxness of the stern jaw, and his gasped interrogation of "You?"

"Possibly your Snake Feeder is some criminal whom the judge has sentenced, and who has come back for revenge."

"Oh, no, sir! The judge wasn't frightened when Mike Johnson jumped at him with a knife, and the Snake Feeder didn't have any weapon in his hand."

Grandfather had heard all about that from my father, who had been there, and he had read about it in the *Daily News*; but he was surprised when he found out that I had been in the court room. He made me tell him all I had seen.

He was silent when I stopped. It was twilight, and, seeing that he had forgotten all about me in puzzling over what he had learned, I slipped away. I wanted to walk by Mamie Merrill's house, because she might be on the front porch alone, and then I would have a chance to tell her, too. Dewey and Squank wouldn't catch me, because they had gone driving with their folks.

Mamie's father and mother were driving, too, and we sat on the front porch and talked. The shadows from the maples, in which the locusts were shrilling, made it so dark that while we could see everybody who passed, nobody could see us; and by and by we were sitting close together.

Charlie Mechant and Nelly Miller passed. She had his arm, and both were

laughing. I knew then what the note had been about, and I felt sorry for Tom Spiers.

"He's too slow, anyway," said Mamie. "He doesn't dance!"

I didn't, either. I resolved to learn as soon as possible, and I told Mamie of my intention. She was pleased, and said she would teach me when it got cooler. I moved over still nearer to her. I don't know what happened to me, but that was when I made up my mind that as soon as I got long pants—which wouldn't be long now—I would marry Mamie. I was going to tell her about it, but every time I started something came up in my throat, and my knees felt funny, so I didn't.

Even though it was dark, I knew how pretty she was. Her brown hair curled, and her brown eyes had a glint in them just like pure agates. Her hands were slender and white, and gave me a queer feeling when I touched them. If I had only washed more carefully before I left home!

I thought I had been there only about a minute when I heard their clock strike nine. I got up to go. If I wasn't in bed by sharp half past, there would be more weeds to pull, and I was sick of weeds. Our front walk had more dandelions and plantains than any other walk in the world, and mother was fussy about keeping them down.

Mamie walked to the gate with me, but I didn't stop. I was afraid to. I wanted to kiss her!

On the way home, I passed Nelly Miller's house. She and Charlie Mechant were sitting on the front porch, and I'm sure they were holding hands. It being near the first of the month, Tom Spiers was working down in the bank. An uneasy thought came over me; but then Mamie Merrill wasn't that kind of a girl!

I went through the alley, and tried to get in the back way, but the screen was hooked, and I had to come around to the front porch. Father and Uncle Henry were waiting for me. Grandfather had told them what Dewey, Squank, and I had seen, and they were eager to hear all about it. In the dark it seemed more exciting than in the daytime, and they had so many questions to ask that it was ten o'clock before father ordered me to bed.

I couldn't go to sleep for a long time, because I could see so many things in the dark. When I finally dropped off, I dreamed that Gabriel White was taking the



Snake Feeder to the calaboose, and I knew that the prisoner had been arrested for killing the judge. So vivid was the dream that it awakened me, and I was scared. I could hear all kinds of strange noises in the house, and I felt as if I was suffocating.

Through the branches of the climbing rose that covered my window I could see the faint gleams from the arc light on the corner. The beams gave me courage, and I got up and pushed aside the vines, hoping to get some air.

The night breeze was pleasing to my heated body, and I stood there looking out at the street. I must have been asleep much longer than I thought, for the clock in the dining room downstairs struck midnight. That was very late for Unionville, and I couldn't hear a sound. Undoubtedly the whole town was in bed and asleep.

The bright moonlight made the night like a silvery day. Directly in my line of vision was a great Scotch elm that stood before the Episcopal church—a tree so large and so old that its branches reached across the small lot and caressed the little brick structure.

Quaint and peculiar was the architecture of that church. The entrance was screened from the street by a brick wall, which formed a vestry open at both ends. In this wall were three windows—a large one in the center, and, higher up, one on each side, two smaller ones. All three were arched, and the trio, in the minds of the imaginative, took on the semblance of a face, the large window being the nose and mouth and the two smaller ones the eyes.

Something held my gaze to the deep shadow cast by the elm. As I peered, I felt gooseflesh coming on me. I thought I saw some one lurking there!

Held by an irresistible attraction, I strained my eyes, half believing that I was dreaming again. Then I saw a man emerge.

His face gleamed white in the moonlight, and, to my surprise, I recognized the intruder. It was the Snake Feeder!

He walked stiffly toward the church, his steps jerky, as if he was being drawn along by a force stronger than himself. At the church steps he started to kneel, but pulled himself up sharply. Stepping back, he shook his fist at the windows.

"I can't do it!" he muttered, his words distinct in the silence. "Don't look at me with those accusing eyes! You made me stop here! You put the thought of prayer

in my mind, and now, oh, my God, I can't do it!"

Holding his hands over his face, the Snake Feeder staggered back until his feet were off the church lot. Then he broke into a crazy zigzag run toward the South Side.

I laughed.

"He's drunk," I thought. "He's drunk, and he takes that wall with the windows for a face!"

In the morning I said nothing of what I had seen. It didn't seem real, and I thought it might have been a dream, for what would the Snake Feeder be doing up on the hill?

Never once did it occur to me that to reach the house of the judge he would have to pass the little brick church with the three windows resembling a grotesque mask.

#### IV

DEWEY, Squank, and I were looking for the Snake Feeder when we encountered Gabriel White. He stopped us, and talked to us about the broken glass in Sorenson's greenhouse. We didn't question him as to why he considered us guilty. We knew we were, and believed that he knew, though he didn't accuse us directly. He merely told us that if we didn't mend our ways, we would probably end up in the Reform School.

None of the sermons of Dr. Boone, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church, made half the impression that that talk did. Dr. Boone preached about hell, and, though his pulpit pictures were vivid, they did not seem real. We did not know any one who had gone to hell; but we did know Otis Roscoe, who had been to the Reform School. He had told us some of the things that happened to boys there.

At that moment Otis Roscoe was in jail again, and the chances were that he would be sent to the penitentiary.

"You should see Sorenson, and fix it up with him," said the marshal, in conclusion.

We didn't want to, but we took his advice. It was far easier to face Sorenson than to face Gabriel White.

The florist took the matter under advisement for several minutes.

"You say it was an accident?" he asked.

"Yes," we answered.

"Well, if you boys will help me clean up around here for the next three days, I'll call it square," he said.

That was reasonable indeed, though this

employment almost made us miss the big riot on the South Side.

John Lucas came down from the Marsh, sold his onions, and went on a spree. A mountain of a man, he raged up and down the South Side, knocking out of his way any one he encountered, and screaming threats of what he would do when he met Gabriel White.

Heads were thrust out of second story windows all around the square. Gabriel White was in a distant part of Unionville, but the news reached him, and he drove up, with his horse foaming. Getting out of the buggy with no unnecessary motions, he hitched the tired animal and stepped across the street. Lucas was in front of the Good Luck, swinging his fists.

"I hear you are looking for me," the marshal said quietly, without drawing his pistol or his club.

"I'll break you in two!" shouted Lucas.

A fist, which looked as large as the bucket of a dredge boat, shot forward. White ducked the blow easily, and, instead of striking back, endeavored to catch Lucas by the elbow.

"No, you don't!" cried the giant, pulling free. "You might be able to arrest common men, but not me! I'm king of the Marsh!"

He launched another terrible blow, which grazed the officer's cheek. As he struck, he lunged, and his stovepipe arms clutched in an embrace which seemingly made White's bones crack.

Gabriel White, built straight up and down like a pole, wriggled free and struck out with his left, the blow landing just under Lucas's eye with a smack. Lucas only laughed—or, rather, snarled. His arms swinging like the vanes of a windmill, he closed in, and he and White traded blows—blows generally ineffective, because they were blocked. Then White landed again under the other eye, and Lucas staggered back a trifle.

That gave the marshal an advantage. He was not carrying the weight his opponent was, and he danced about, dodging the other man's flail-like arms, and striking Lucas again and again low on the body, the impact of the blows sounding like beating on a hollow log.

Maddened, Lucas rushed again. As he did so, White slipped on a wet place in the sidewalk. Before the marshal could recover his balance, Lucas was on him. Both

of White's arms were pinioned, but his attacker had one free, and with it he struck the marshal in the face time after time, blood following each blow.

The crowd, ringed about the combatants, cheered. Gabriel White, whose record of taking his man without assistance had stood for years, was about to be dethroned!

But once more—how he did it we did not know—Gabriel White eeled free. In a flash, his fist landed just below Lucas's left ear, and the giant lifted from his feet and fell backward like a chopped tree.

For a second the loafers were stupefied; then, with a yell, they attacked White from all sides. They had seen him all but knocked out by one man, and they believed that they could overwhelm him with numbers. Many a man in that crowd had felt the weight of the marshal's club, and some he had thrust into the calaboose, and they were thirsting for revenge. With what Lucas had accomplished, they thought that their time was at hand.

White disappeared in a whirl of shouting, cursing men; but only for a moment. He came up with his club free, and the stout hickory rose and fell again and again. Every time it descended, a man went to the bricks.

The number of attackers did not decrease, for men poured out of the saloons and replaced those who were disabled; but still the marshal stood erect, fighting with fist and club. We could see that he was trying to work around until his back would be against the front of the Good Luck.

Dewey, Squank, and I were thrilled at the sight. It was the best fight we had ever seen, and we enjoyed it thoroughly. Then, suddenly, we wanted to scream a warning. Gabriel White was no particular friend of ours, but he represented the law. He was the man who kept the peace in Unionville, and the town respected him. Moreover, he was one man fighting many, and sneaking up behind him was a ruffian with a steel crowbar.

Gabriel White's cap had been knocked off long ago. His slightly bald head was bare to the impending blow, and we stood there tongue-tied!

Then came a newcomer into the fight—a heavy, bloodless man, the Snake Feeder, and he ranged himself on the side of the law. His fist, with a sound like a slap, struck the face of the man with the crowbar. The fellow dropped.

Seizing the iron and prodding his way with it, the Snake Feeder reached the marshal's side. There was a light in his eyes that made men give him room.

Before Dewey, Squank, and I could quite realize it, the fight was over. Those in the rear turned away first, and those in front gave back until the sidewalk was practically clear. Then Gabriel White, his face speckled and blotched, his hands bruised, and his club crimson almost its entire length, arrested Lucas and lugged him off to the calaboose, with a big protuberance purpling slowly on his head. Men with blood on their faces went into the saloons, or washed themselves at the drinking fountains, and the South Side settled back to normal.

It was almost a week later that we encountered Gabriel White. Aside from a black eye, he was all right, and he smiled at us.

"So you saw Sorenson," he said. "That was the straight thing to do, boys. I'm proud of you, and I don't believe it's necessary to tell your folks about it."

We three felt happy. A big load was off our minds. Also we revised our opinion of Gabriel White to a great extent, and understood why he was so popular in Unionville—except among the rough element, which didn't amount to anything, anyway. Taken all in all, we appreciated Gabriel, and felt that Unionville should be proud to have an officer like him.

But it was on circus day that he reached the highest point in my admiration. Dewey and Squank and all the other boys I knew went into the big tent early, but I stood outside alone. So far as I was concerned, the parade would be all that I could see, and this was the only circus coming that year.

It was a period of deep financial embarrassment with me. In a moment of overconfidence I had bought a brass reel for my fishing rod, believing that I could easily earn another quarter; but odd jobs, with their nickels and dimes, had never been so scarce. Bitterly indeed did I repent the lure of that window on Michigan Street, just south of the square, as I saw all Unionville going through the main entrance of the circus.

My home standing was such that I had not even wasted breath by making an appeal for funds. On three evenings in succession I had vanished without watering

the lawn. True, I had important things to attend to. There was much that I had to talk over with Mamie Merrill, but I couldn't give that as an excuse.

So I stood there, the loneliest boy in Unionville. I saw Nelly Miller go in with Tom Spiers, and even the knowledge that Charlie Mechant would have to do Tom's work in addition to his own, because Tom had taken an afternoon off, did not cheer me. Then I saw Mamie go in with her father, and I wanted to sink through the ground. She would think I was a cheap skate, and I would never be able to face her again.

The band struck up the opening number—the one just before all the circus people and the animals march around the ring in the "grand triumphal entry." Hope was ended, but I couldn't leave.

"Going in, sonny?" asked some one.

I looked up, and there stood Gabriel White in his best uniform, his shoes brilliant with polish. I could feel my face getting redder and redder. Even my ears burned as I shook my head. I wanted to tell him of my plight, but I couldn't.

I didn't have to. The marshal took me by the hand, and the doorkeeper smiled and passed us in. Another man handed Gabriel White two pieces of cardboard, and an usher took us to reserved seats right in front of the ring.

It was the best circus I ever saw. The clowns did their funniest tricks in front of where we sat, and Gabriel White bought peanuts and lemonade. As I sat there, thoroughly happy, I understood why Gabriel White had been the marshal for so long, why at each successive election he got more votes, and why everybody in Unionville felt safe while he represented the law.

Dewey and Squank were away over to one side, on the blue seats, which were only boards. Mamie Merrill and her father were at one end, where they couldn't see all the acts. Tom Spiers and Nelly Miller had reserved seats, but they weren't half as good as ours.

I was so proud and happy that I believed I could lick any one who didn't like Gabriel White—that is, every one except Will Wilson, who hated the marshal.

## V

WILL WILSON hated Gabriel White with the intensity of a conscienceless man whose living is threatened.



Gabriel White had no diffidence about going into Wilson's gambling room when some poor man was being cheated, making Wilson disgorge, and keeping the place closed as long as possible. The fact that White was the only man in Unionville who dared do such a thing hurt worse than it would have otherwise.

Unionville was tolerant of Will Wilson. Various mayors took the attitude that gambling was to be endured along with flies and other evils, and that, such being the case, Wilson might as well have the privilege of fleecing his fellow townsmen as any one else. Wilson was always a heavy contributor to the campaign fund of the "liberal" candidate, and there was a general disposition on the part of politicians to stand in with him. He had many friends, hangers-on, or adherents—generally those whose notes he held—and they voted as he said.

I knew this because I had often heard my father and grandfather talk about it. Dewey and Squank knew it because they heard the folks discuss it.

So Will Wilson flourished, with only Gabriel White as a check. Despite the marshal, Wilson would stand by the stairway leading to his "gambling hell," as my mother called it, on the South Side, his black hair shining, his black mustache waxed at the ends into tight little rolls, and his gray suit, with its pin stripe of red, as near "form fitting" as the best tailor in Lima could make it.

Dewey, Squank, and I always watched Will Wilson, for he possessed the fascination that evil has for adolescence. We saw him nod to various persons as they passed, and to some he spoke. Those addressed usually climbed the stairway.

When five or six had gone up, Wilson ceased to be a black spider at the entrance to his web, and disappeared. The game was "on." On Saturday night the six tables were always filled, and he did not need to extend invitations.

We tried to make our deposits in the Union National on Monday morning, because it was then that Wilson turned over to Charlie Mechant a great roll of bills, and we enjoyed seeing the teller leaf through them and enter the total in a long yellow book. We were frankly envious. If we had only one of those deposits, we believe that there would be enough to purchase safety bicycles for all three of us.

The Monday after Gabriel White took me to the circus, we followed Will Wilson into the bank as closely as we dared. While Charlie was counting the bills, Wilson stood there silent; but when the entry was made and blotted, and the pass book handed back and stowed away in Wilson's inside vest pocket, he asked:

"Be up as usual to-night, Charlie?"

"I'll be there with bells on, Will," the teller answered confidently, after he had looked about to see that none of the bank's officials were within hearing distance.

Dewey, Squank, and I didn't attach any importance to that remark. In fact, we forgot all about it, our minds being fixed on a fishing trip that had been delayed by our interest in Will Wilson. Squank had heard about a wonderful hole three miles up the river, and we had our tackle all ready.

Judge Browne was coming into the bank as Wilson was going out, and Wilson nodded and spoke. The judge, however, walked in as if he hadn't seen the gambler, and Wilson scowled.

"Wonder what the judge would do to Wilson if he ever was up in front of him?" asked Dewey guardedly.

"Give him about a million years in jail," replied Squank. "I wonder what he would do if the Snake Feeder was in front of him?"

We couldn't answer that, but we turned back to look at the judge. He was the same as ever, all dignity, and the bank president himself was attending to his deposit; but in our eyes he seemed much older than he had looked before he met the Snake Feeder.

The fishing hole was even better than we expected. Late as we were, we each caught a good mess of sunfish—sunfish so big that our fathers couldn't say they were only good enough to grease the pan with. We never could see any humor in that remark, though our fathers always laughed at it.

Our success caused us to resolve to visit this hole, which we named the Old Sycamore, every time we had a chance, and to guard its location with great secrecy, because we knew what happened to holes that became too popular.

For some time we went up there whenever we could. Consequently, we only caught glimpses of the Snake Feeder, but I saw the judge almost every day as he



walked past our house on his way down town. Sometimes I saw him coming home late in the evening, and almost always Gabriel White was with him.

One night, when we were alone, I asked my grandfather if he had heard why the judge had seemed to be so much afraid of the Snake Feeder.

"I don't know that he is," said grandfather. "I can't find out anything about it. Maybe Gabriel White knows, but he won't say anything. Different from the rest of the people in this town, Gabriel is. Judging by the company he keeps, your Snake Feeder doesn't amount to much. Anyway, I can't believe the judge is afraid of him."

"Then why does Gabriel White walk home with him whenever he stays down town until after dark?"

"I don't know," remarked grandfather, tapping the floor with his cane—which meant that he didn't want to be bothered any more.

I went over to Mamie Merrill's, and we talked about it for a long time. We talked about other things, too, and when it got dark, I held her hand! It was a soft, uneasy little hand, but it never quite slipped from my fingers. My heart fairly fluttered, and I wished it was fall, so that I could have my long trousers.

I got home just one minute ahead of time, and was in bed when my mother made her usual inspection. If I hadn't been, I couldn't have gone fishing the next morning. It was my lucky evening!

Dewey and Squank were lucky, too, and we were all happy as we walked along the river bank, until we heard some one coughing in the willows. It was a tearing, hacking cough, violent at first, then growing fainter and fainter.

Squank parted the bushes, and we saw the Snake Feeder lying on the ground, red foam coming from his lips. Remembering what Gabriel White had done, we filled our caps and bathed the Snake Feeder's face; but it was a long time before he opened his blue eyes and saw three gray-countenanced boys bending over him. We thought he was gone.

He smiled and tried to sit up, but he was too weak. Dewey, who was the biggest of us, lifted him, and we moved him over against a willow. After panting a little while, he reached into his trousers pocket and brought out three silver dollars.

In those days a dollar looked as big around as the head of a bass drum.

"If you will do me the honor to accept it, I would like the pleasure of bestowing this trash on my rescuers," he said, speaking with difficulty, but with a twinkle in his eyes. "I have met you three gentlemen somewhere before, but your identity escapes me for the moment. Oh, yes—now I recall the time and the environment. It was the day when I encountered your most estimable judge, and when your efficient but somewhat rough town marshal restrained me from a rash and violent act. Some day, when I know him better, I hope to convey my thanks to him for that."

"But you saved him that day on the square, when those loafers were trying to beat him up."

"So you saw that, too? Ubiquitous boys, indeed! That was merely another impulse, so I deserve no credit. Why dwell on it? Instead, we'll dismiss the subject and revert to the one of recompense for the service you have just rendered me."

He got to his feet stiffly and thrust the three dollars toward us. We held back, not because we didn't want such wealth, but because it didn't seem quite right to take it. Undoubtedly he had saved the marshal's life, and not only had he received no reward, but he even didn't want to talk about it. So how could we accept remuneration for merely bathing his face?

"I'd feel better if you boys accepted this," the Snake Feeder continued. "Money means nothing to me. It was a little late in arriving—that's all. Yes, and it would have made but slight difference, if any, to this old world, if you had allowed me to die."

He stopped then, and we still hung back. Instead of arguing, he thrust a dollar into the hot palm of each of us. Then he slumped down, and we thought he was going to faint again; but he didn't.

Instead, he began to converse with us, but not as a grown-up to boys. He didn't talk down to us, but talked as one boy to another, boy slang and all. He was a boy the same as we, a boy with the same thoughts and the same interests—the same hopes, I was about to add, but that would have been error, for the future did not enter into the Snake Feeder's conversation.

He discussed fishing, the habits and haunts of worms, and whether spitting on the hook brought luck. He held that it

did—if the fish were there. He talked about the science of one old cat. He told us the best way to cure warts—I had three large ones, and was particularly interested, though the remedy he recommended was to be bought in drug stores, and not found in woods or graveyards. Acetic acid, I believe he called it.

He talked of the shortness of vacation and the length of the school term, and told us why the ponds turned green in the summer. It wasn't long before our hearts went out to him as one of our own kind, and soon we were revealing our curious boyish world, with all its indefinite, inchoate aims.

The Snake Feeder listened closely, occasionally spurring us on with a pertinent question, until an attenuated insect settled itself on a pile of driftwood held against the bank by an inshore eddy.

"What is that?" he asked, picking up the visitor with his thumb and forefinger, but doing it so gently that the delicate wings were uninjured.

"A snake feeder," ejaculated Squank, not without embarrassment.

Our Snake Feeder laughed loud and loud. Then he released the insect and watched it speed away.

"I mustn't injure my namesake," he said, still laughing. "I've been wondering where this town got its label for me. I see it now. It's mighty apt!"

The member of the *odonata* family gone, the Snake Feeder resumed talking with us. So skillfully did he lead the conversation into the channels that he desired, that far more subtle persons than Dewey, Squank, and I would have been equally unsuspecting. Right willingly we pictured to him the leading people in Unionville.

"Who is your most prominent resident, the one everybody looks up to?" he asked at last.

The inquiry was casual, though I noted subconsciously that his knuckles—his hands were clasped over his knees—whitened as he spoke.

"The judge!" we exclaimed, without hesitation.

"Oh, yes—the judge. Tell me about him."

The honor—for as such I took it—fell to me. Rapidly I recited the well known facts. The judge lived in the white house at the top of the hill, the one with the iron fence around it. He was always elected by a large majority, and while people said

he was hard, they also said he was just, because he treated alike all who came before him. He was an elder in the First Presbyterian Church. He sat in the second pew from the front, and on Sundays he put a dollar bill in the collection plate.

The Snake Feeder appeared to be so much interested that I prodded my mind for further details, but all I could remember was that he was the example of all that was right and good, according to everybody who knew him. Several boys whom we knew intended to study law and grow up to be commanding, outstanding figures like him.

"How long has he lived here?"

I hesitated for a moment, being about to reply "Always," and then remembering what my grandfather told my Uncle Henry.

"About fifteen years," I said.

"His name is Gilbert Browne?"

"How did you know that?"

The surprise I felt was in my voice.

"Never mind! I know a great many things. Who lives with him?"

"A colored woman," answered Dewey, grabbing the center of the stage from me. "She's the blackest wench in town, and skinny."

"He hasn't any use for women, my grandfather says," I interjected, and thus regained my rightful place. "He has never married."

"Where did he come from?"

The Snake Feeder had caught my arm in a grip that hurt, and I thought he was looking at me just as he looked at the judge that day on the square.

"Let go, please, Snake—"

"'Snake Feeder' is right," he said, releasing me; "and just about as harmless as the dragon flies that you boys call by the name!"

Without saying good-by, the Snake Feeder left us.

We decided that it was too late to go fishing. Those three dollars were burning holes in our pockets, so we went to Beaver's store and bought new rods. Penniless, but thoroughly happy, we walked toward our homes, talking about the Snake Feeder. The interest he had shown in the judge and his home mystified us.

With the judge on our minds, we kept on up the hill until we reached his house. After looking at it for a long time from the front, we went around to the back.

The alley gate was locked tight. How

we dared to do it, and why, we didn't know, but we climbed the back fence, which was a tangle of vines. When we got into the yard, we found the judge's housekeeper waiting for us, with fire in her eyes, and her thin lips a straight line.

"Ef you-all don't get out right now, Ah'll po' b'ilin' water on you!" she said.

She held a teakettle in her hand, and steam was issuing from the spout. She was a short, emaciated woman, but there was such menace in her words and attitude that we went back over the fence more hurriedly than we had entered.

Two days later our hands broke out with white, watery blisters. Those vines were poison ivy.

## VI

AN odd vehicle came along Front Street to the courthouse, where the driver stopped his horses. It was a covered wagon—not a prairie schooner, but a battered farm wagon, with a worn and dirty canvas top patched in several places, the bows sagging. A stovepipe protruding from the rear was a certain sign that it was a habitation as well as a conveyance.

As soon as we saw the man on the front seat, we named him the Red Man. He was big and heavy in build. The bridge of his nose was high, and his nostrils wide and hairy. The skin of his face was red, and sprouts of heavy red beard stubbled his cheeks, his upper lip, his chin, and his throat. The front of his blue flannel shirt was open, revealing a thick mat of red hair on his chest. His eyes were rimmed with red, and his big hands were red, even the freckles that dotted their woolly backs being more red than yellow.

A shriveled wisp of a woman, whose features were hidden by a tunnel-like sunbonnet, was on the seat with him. Her calico dress was faded in queer streaks and worn in places.

Tying the team to the rack, the Red Man—apparently unobserved by his companion—took an apple from his pocket and fed it to one of his horses. Then, without a word to the woman, he strode past Dewey, Squank, and me, and, crossing the street, shouldered his way insolently through the crowd of idlers and into one of the saloons.

The woman sat on the seat, unmoving, her head down.

"Marsh rats!" said Dewey. "Probably their onions were blown out of the ground,

and they didn't have any money for more seed."

"And now they're living in that wagon. Gosh, I'd like to do that—just roam around the country!" added Squank.

"She doesn't look like a marsh rat," I objected.

"You're an expert, you are!" taunted Dewey. "If that dress isn't marsh, then I don't know!"

"It's her hands," I retorted, stung by Dewey's tone. "They're as clean as—" I hesitated for want of a simile. Then a scene down among the willows, many days before, came to me. "As clean as the Snake Feeder's," I concluded.

"I noticed that, too," said Squank. "They're long and thin, and, though they look like she's done hard work, they're white and clean. She hasn't been weeding onions."

Dewey agreed reluctantly. The hands of the onion weeders were always grimy, because the fine, black soil of the marsh worked into the skin.

That point settled, we went over to the Union National to do our banking. As usual, we passed by Charlie Mechant and interrupted Tom Spiers, who was working on his books.

"By rights you should go to Charlie," he said, getting down off his high stool and smiling at us. "He's the teller, and I'm only a bookkeeper."

"If it isn't bothering you too much, we'd rather do business with you," said Dewey, and we backed him up.

"No bother at all, boys," replied Tom. "If I can attract depositors, I'm a part of the assets of this bank. Glad to serve any time I can."

He didn't laugh when he said it, and his eyes were serious. Courteously he handed back the three books with the neat entries, and turned to his work.

"Hello, millionaires!" said Charlie Mechant, as we passed his window.

I wished he would get a job at the Farmers' Savings, so that I wouldn't see him any more; but when we were almost at the door, he beckoned to me, and I went back.

"Here's a dime and a note for Miss Miller," he whispered. "Bring me back an answer, and there's another dime in it for you."

With money coming in like that, I could afford to suppress my feelings; so I told Squank and Dewey I would meet them at

the fishing tackle store, and they said they would wait.

I ran almost all the way to the Millers' house, but Nelly asked me to sit down while she read the message. As she read, her black eyes snapped and her face got red.

"No answer," she said. "If he thinks he can tell me who I can go with—but wait just a minute."

I sat down again. It was a lot longer than a minute, for she wrote one note and tore it up. Then she started two more before her pen began to scratch regularly. My, but she was pretty!

When she handed it to me at last, the envelope was sealed.

"Don't give it to any one else but him," she warned, the color still in her face, and I promised.

I delivered the note to Charlie, and stood there, waiting for my pay. He bit his lip while he was reading. When he finished, he tore the paper into fine pieces and threw them into the wastebasket.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded crossly, when he looked up and saw me still there.

"My dime," I answered.

He only turned his back and fussed with a pile of bills.

"Get out!" he ordered at last.

I made up my mind that when I got my long trousers I'd get even with him, if I had to make dates with Nelly Miller myself. Then I thought of Mamie Merrill, and saw that that wouldn't do. There would be some other way.

Dewey and Squank were pretty mad at me, but when I told them how Charlie Merchant had acted they were sore at him. Having nothing else to do, we walked over toward the courthouse yard.

A knot of people, rapidly growing larger, was gathered about the place where the Red Man had tied his team. One of the horses was down, and, just as we got there, it died. Some one went into the saloon and told the Red Man. He came running over, swearing expertly.

"I didn't want to stop in this hellhole any longer than it took me to get a couple of drinks of liquor, but now, with this damned horse dead, I'm stuck in the rotten place for God only knows how long!" he roared, after he had apparently reached a climax in invective.

More highly colored oaths followed.

"Quit swearing," interrupted Gabriel

White, stepping forward authoritatively. "If you can't buy another horse, and don't want to live in your wagon while you're earning money enough to go on, there's a house down on the river bank you can use."

The Red Man glared at the representative of the law as if White was the cause of his troubles; but after a moment or so he subsided.

"I'll shake the dust of this damned place off my feet just as soon as I can, Mr. Officer," he snarled. "Get me down to that house!"

The woman, still on the front seat in almost exactly the same position as she was when the Red Man left her, didn't say a word or raise her head.

Gabriel White borrowed a horse from the livery stable and showed the Red Man where the house was. It was a crazy shack, with flood records in ochre on the outside, and slime and filth on the inside. The Red Man seemed to be satisfied, however, and the woman, silent during disaster, was mute until the marshal left.

Then in a flash she turned on the Red Man.

"You murderer!" she exclaimed.

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" he growled.

"You killed the horse with that apple!"

"So you saw me, did you? What if I did kill the critter? It was my horse, wasn't it? Anyway, what have you got to kick about? You've got a house to live in, with plenty of running water"—he waved a red paw toward the river—"and I'm going to live easy. I'm safe here—safe as a bug in a rug. I'm—what are you brats doing here?"

His red-lighted eyes were on us.

We judged that it was time to go. It was so late that we had to run all the way home to avoid missing our suppers.

My folks were just sitting down. Before they could scold me, I began telling about the Red Man and his horse.

"Unionville is growing," remarked my grandfather, when I ran out of material. "First the Snake Feeder, and now the Red Man!"

"The Snake Feeder is more or less of a mystery," responded my father, filling my plate with meat and potatoes. "I heard to-day that he lives in one of the best rooms in the St. George Hotel, and always has plenty of money, though he hasn't



done a stroke of work since he came here. He's the best dressed man in Unionville, too."

"He hasn't met the judge lately, has he?" asked my grandfather, cupping his ear with his hand to catch the reply, father being on his deaf side.

"The judge doesn't go on the South Side," answered my father. "The South Side doesn't care for him. There are too many missing from there because of him—boarding down at the penitentiary and in the workhouse!"

I was going to tell how the Snake Feeder had questioned us about the judge, but I thought better of it. I had escaped the scolding, and I didn't want to attract any more attention than was strictly necessary. Moreover, I looked on the Snake Feeder as my friend, while my folks evidently didn't regard him as a desirable associate.

As soon as I got through with my work, I sneaked over to Mamie Merrill's house. The moon was big and round, and we sat on the front porch, in the shadow of the clematis vines, which were full of purple flowers. I had washed carefully before leaving home, and after a while—it took me a long time, because I did not want her to know what I was doing—I found her hand and held it.

By and by we were sitting close together, and, still without letting her know what I was doing, I put my arm around her. It was the first time I ever had my arm around a girl, and I didn't know how pleasant and thrilling it could be. I kept her from realizing where I had my arm by telling her what I intended to do when I got through school.

She was the sweetest girl in the whole world! About her was a touch of perfume that reminded me of wild flowers. Whenever the night wind parted the vines enough for the moonbeams to shine through, I could see those pure agate glints dancing in her eyes.

Nelly Miller and Tom Spiers walked by. Tom wore a new brown suit and stood up straight. He was a fine-looking fellow, with one of those broad faces and square chins. His blue eyes, while they were jolly, and not at all stern, were steady and fine. Nelly was laughing and Tom looked happy. I guess the whole world was happy. I know I was.

I told Mamie about the note Charlie had sent Nelly, and how Charlie had beaten

me out of a dime. I felt that with my arm around her I could tell her everything.

"Charlie Mechant, with all his good looks, doesn't know much about girls," she sniffed.

"Why?"

"Stupid! Don't you see, Charlie found out she had a date with Tom for to-night, and tried to get her to break it. She wouldn't do it, and that's what made him so cross."

That explanation had never occurred to me, but I knew Mamie was right.

We talked a little while longer, and I held her closer. Her face was upturned and her wonderful eyes were shining. Before I realized what I was doing, I had bent over and kissed her full on her sweet red lips!

She drew back, startled, and pushed me away with such force that I almost fell off the bench.

"Go!" she commanded, and I could feel a sting in her voice.

"Mamie—" I began awkwardly, my face a flame and my knees trembling.

"Don't talk to me," she said, "and don't come back any more."

The pure agate glints no longer danced in her eyes.

A wretched, condemned criminal, I slunk out of the yard and down the street. Nelly and Tom were sitting on her porch, and she was singing. I couldn't look at them, and the song made me want to cry—and it was all my own fault!

There wasn't anybody on our porch. My folks had gone to a party, and grandfather was in bed. It was one of those rare nights when I could stay out late without being sentenced to hard labor on the weeds; but I didn't care for liberty. My heart was too heavy. I just sat there on the porch and mourned.

The judge went by, Gabriel White walking with him. As they passed, I heard the marshal mention the name of Will Wilson.

Nobody else was on the street, and it was very still. I heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven, but I couldn't go to bed, because I was too miserable. I had lost Mamie Merrill, and nothing mattered.

I heard some one coming, and shrank back into the shadows. I didn't want anybody to see me, and I didn't want to see anybody; but the footfalls stopped a short distance from the house, and my curiosity was excited.

I looked down the street. Standing in front of the Episcopal Church was the Snake Feeder!

I forgot my troubles instantly. The judge was at home, and the Snake Feeder was on his way thither. Vaguely I sensed tragedy. My nerves were taut.

The Snake Feeder looked about him carefully. I thought he was making sure that he was not being followed. Then he darted into the vestry of the church, and I heard the door, which was never locked, being opened cautiously.

My footsteps muffled by the grass, I stole across the lawns to the church. In the rear of the building there was a window of plain glass, and I climbed up to this and peered inside.

For a long time I could see nothing except the altar and the pews, though the moonlight streamed through the stained glass windows, and I thought the Snake Feeder must have come out. Finally I saw him. He was kneeling before the altar, and his head was bowed. I got down and waited behind a near-by tree.

Fifteen minutes must have elapsed before I heard the door open and close, and the Snake Feeder stepped outside. He stood there, gazing at the three windows that made the front of the church resemble a mask, and I saw him as a different Snake Feeder. It was his face that had changed. The old expression, half sadness and half contempt for the world, was gone. In its place was a look of peace.

Instead of going toward the South Side, he took the street that led to the St. George Hotel.

## VII

WILL WILSON had been indicted by the grand jury as a professional gambler! The announcement in the *Daily News* shook the town. Every one knew that Wilson made his living by gambling. His place upstairs on the South Side was undisguised, but this was the first time the law had taken cognizance of his calling.

Despite the effect on Unionville, the indictment did not seem to affect Wilson. He stood at the stairway just as usual, and laughed and talked with those who stopped, though he did not invite them upstairs. He was freshly barbered, his suit was new, and in his buttonhole was a red geranium blossom with a leaf as a background, the stems done up in tinfoil.

Mayor Valley left the courthouse and leaned against the iron fence, idly looking up and down the street. Wilson saw him and came over.

"I guess you had better close up for a little while, Will," said the mayor to the gambler.

"All right, Frank! I'll lay low until this thing blows over. Of course Gabe White took that boob Sawyer before the grand jury, and backed up his testimony, but I wonder who got the fool to squeal?"

"Tom Spiers?"

"Tom Spiers?" echoed Wilson, an ugly look coming into his cat eyes, and his smooth, white forehead wrinkling in a scowl. "How in hell did he know anything about it? He's never been in my place."

Dewey, Squank, and I were sitting in the grass behind the fence, attracting no attention to ourselves.

"Well, Will, you've been trimming Ned Sawyer pretty regularly. Tom Spiers is nobody's damn fool. He saw Sawyer's account getting lower and lower, and then he found out about a mortgage Ned had put on his house. Tom asked him about it, and Ned told him. He knows Ned's wife and three kids, so he went to White, and with the assistance of that strait-laced officer he got Sawyer to go before the grand jury. By the way, Will, this is in confidence, of course. You know where it came from."

Wilson nodded.

"And because of Tom Spiers I've got to close the works for a while! Damn fine piece of business for Tom Spiers! I've never meddled in his affairs, but guess I'll have to take a hand now. Maybe I'll have to change my banking place."

Wilson strode over to the Union National in great indignation; but he didn't go to Tom Spiers's high desk. He went right into the office of Aaron Burns, the white-headed president, a citizen second only in importance to the judge.

In a few minutes Tom Spiers was summoned to the president's office.

"Guess I'm called up on the carpet," he said to Charlie Merchant, as he passed the teller's window.

Tom had seen Wilson enter. Charlie looked white, and his hands trembled as he arranged a lot of loose bills. He didn't reply.

Dewey, Squank, and I, who had followed unobtrusively, could hear a steady murmur

of voices behind the glass that inclosed the office of Mr. Burns, but we could not tell what was being said.

"Hope Charlie Mechant is called in, too," whispered Squank.

He wasn't, however, and by and by Tom came out. His face was flushed, and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead, but he didn't seem to be downhearted.

Tom was busily working on his books when Wilson, cool, suave, smiling, opened the door. As he did so, Mr. Burns pressed a black cigar with a gold band into the gambler's hand.

"I can assure you there will be no more such happenings," said the bank president. "Spiers meant all right, but he's young, and lacks balance in such matters. After all, he's only a bookkeeper."

"Oh, we'll let bygones be bygones this time," replied Will Wilson, smiling at Charlie Mechant.

Charlie didn't return the smile. The president was looking at him. He merely nodded and stood at the window, as if he was expecting Wilson to make a deposit, though the day was not Monday.

As soon as Wilson went out through the big front door, Mr. Burns, paying no attention to us, hurried back to Tom, his face black.

"I should have fired you in Wilson's presence," he said coldly. "It is the business of this bank's employees to bring in depositors, instead of chasing them away."

"But you didn't lose Wilson's account, sir."

"It was through no fault of yours that we didn't. Why didn't you apologize to him?"

"Because I believe I did right. Also because I know too much about Wilson's business. In addition, I know the business of the patrons of his establishment—a great many of them."

Charlie Mechant, who, though he had his back turned, could hear as plainly as we, looked as if he was going to be ill.

"That's what you told him, and you needn't repeat it. Business is business. Our business is to get as much money into our vaults as possible. We owe that to our stockholders. It's a good thing for you, Tom Spiers, that Will Wilson is generous enough to allow his account to remain in the Union National. There isn't a business man around the square with a balance as large as Wilson's."

"Perhaps Will Wilson is the reason why!"

Mr. Burns turned purple, and his well trimmed white goatee quivered. When he did speak, he fairly choked out his words.

"You've a mighty good record here, outside of this one thing, Tom Spiers, but you're driving me to throw you out."

"If I'm to be thrown out for telling the truth, Mr. Burns, go ahead!"

Tom got off his stool and walked to the hook where his street coat and hat were hanging.

Burns glared at him for a moment. Tom was just as cool and steady as if he was leaving for his noonday meal instead of giving up a good job. Mr. Burns still hesitated while Tom was putting on his coat; but as he reached for his hat, the president spoke.

"Don't let it happen again," he snapped, and returned to his private office.

We wanted to congratulate Tom, who removed his coat and went back to work, but we decided that it would be best to efface ourselves.

Father had to go to the Masonic lodge, so we had an early supper. I watered the lawn three times, having nothing else to do. Then I got a dull knife and pried out some weeds. Grandfather looked at me queerly.

"Sick or something?" he asked.

"No," I lied.

It was a lie. I was sick—sick for Mamie Merrill. I hadn't seen her for more than two weeks. I never realized how much difference a girl made, but I did then. Two weeks! It seemed like two years; yet when I shut my eyes, I could see her brown hair and her eyes with the glints of the pure agate.

Just as soon as it was dark enough, I sneaked through the alley over to Main Street and started for her house. I couldn't stand it any longer. I was afraid to meet her, but it was my last hope.

Nelly Miller was sitting on her porch, alone. She saw me and called to me cheerfully, and I answered her. There was a mischievous look on her face, but she didn't say anything about Mamie Merrill.

Mamie was not on her porch. I walked to the end of the street and then back again, but she hadn't come out. Then I walked down almost as far as Nelly Miller's, and returned. This time I whistled the call that Mamie knew. I walked very

slowly, and looked back almost constantly, but though the front door was open—a certain indication that she was at home—she didn't come out.

I didn't want to see Dewey, and I didn't want to see Squank. I only wanted to see one person in the world, and she wouldn't see me; so I turned around and walked down town.

Charlie Mechant drove up to Nelly Miller's in one of Burchard's best rigs—a new stanhope with rubber tires and a chestnut horse that pranced and stepped high. I guess it was an unlucky day for both Tom Spiers and myself!

It was a beautiful late summer evening, and many people were on the streets. I knew all of them, but I was lonely—more lonely than I had ever been before. The katydids were singing. In six weeks there would be frost, and summer and vacation would be over; but instead of shrilling “Katy did, Katy didn't,” every one of them was calling:

“Mamie Merrill, Mamie Merrill!”

The courthouse yard was dark, and I sat on a bench for a while. I couldn't think of anything else but Mamie Merrill, so I started to walk again.

The South Side was all lighted up, with the exception of Will Wilson's place, and there was a big crowd. I looked for the Snake Feeder among those in front of the Good Luck, but he wasn't there. Then I remembered that since the night I saw him kneeling in the Episcopal church, he hadn't been on the South Side.

At the corner I met him. He was taking a drink from one of the iron fountains, and when he finished he wiped his mouth on a white handkerchief. He spoke, and I stopped.

“Hello, friend!” he said. “Taking a stroll?”

I didn't know whether I was or not, but I nodded assent.

“Do you mind if I walk with you? I'm a little lonely to-night.”

I wanted to tell him that he didn't know what loneliness meant, but I was silent as he fell into step with me.

We walked around the square as far as Turney's drug store, and he asked me to have a soda. I took a vanilla milk shake, and felt an improvement.

In the store I could see that the Snake Feeder looked much better than he did the last time I saw him. His clothes were new,

and his face seemed fuller. There was a spot of crimson in each cheek, but his lips were as bloodless as ever.

Out in the air I was silent again, because those katydids kept up their everlasting “Mamie Merrill, Mamie Merrill!” I wished there wasn't a katydid in the whole world.

“What's the matter, boy?” the Snake Feeder said kindly.

“Nothing. Why?”

“You haven't said a word in the last ten minutes. Are you angry with me?”

“No.”

“What's troubling you, then?”

The Snake Feeder placed an arm—all bone, except for a knot of muscle—on my shoulder.

“Come on—sit down here and tell me all about it. You can trust the old Snake Feeder!”

We sat down on a bench. Across the street, in one of the saloons, a piano was playing—some one had put a nickel in it—and a man with a husky tenor voice was singing a sad song. There was the sound of a scuffle, and a man was thrown out of the Good Luck. He struck in the gutter. When he got up and staggered on his way without a word, he was covered with filth.

I told the Snake Feeder all about Mamie Merrill. Something made me. Of course, I didn't mention Mamie's name, but I told him why I had lost her. He didn't interrupt me, but kept his arm on my shoulder, and that was comforting. Then I realized that I was telling him something I would have revealed to no one else.

“It's hard, all right—I know,” he said; “but what do you intend to do when you finish school?”

I couldn't answer directly, because Mamie Merrill had been so deeply involved in my plans for the future, and now there was no Mamie Merrill in my life; so I didn't say anything.

“Did you ever think about studying law?”

“No—civil engineering.”

“The law offers many opportunities for bright young men.”

“Are you a lawyer?”

“I know a great deal about the law.”

Then he told me about the profession—how a man might make a name for himself, and at the same time might serve those who called on him. He interested me, and turned my thoughts into a new channel.



"And I might get to be like the judge!" I exclaimed.

"The judge!" he repeated, that knot of muscle tensing. "Don't you people think of any one but the judge? I hear about him always."

"And you know him?"

The Snake Feeder looked away.

"Yes, I know him—know him better than anybody else in Unionville."

"How can you, when you've been here such a short time?"

"That's a matter I don't care to discuss to-night. Certain things I intended to do have been delayed through no fault of my own. Let's talk about something pleasant. I've tried to keep out of Judge Browne's way, but he's always being thrust under my nose. Sometimes I think I'll—"

"Why do you stay here, then?"

"I can't answer that question. Perhaps I may tell you some day, but not now. By the way, what do people here in Unionville say about me besides calling me the Snake Feeder?"

Again an impulse toward candor came over me, and I told him that people regarded him as a mystery.

"Why?"

"Because you haven't done a tap of work since you've been here, yet you always have money, you live at the St. George, and you're the best dressed man in Unionville."

The Snake Feeder laughed.

"Perhaps they think I'm a burglar!"

"No, I don't believe so; but nobody knows your real name."

"Snake Feeder will do as well as any. It's descriptive, anyway. I even registered that way at the St. George. This is in confidence, young man—strict confidence. Nobody need worry about my means of existence. Years ago I received money enough to keep me the rest of my life, no matter how long I may live. Since then I've been on a long journey. The end of it seems to be Unionville. I'm content to be the Snake Feeder here. I don't know how long a time I have yet, but, as I view things now, I'll spend the rest of my allotment here. By the way, do you know what's the matter with me?"

"Whisky," I replied promptly, though I didn't smell any on his breath.

"Yes—whisky and something else. Whisky is bad, but the other is fatal. Whisky makes me forget, at times, but just

at present I'm trying to forget whisky. I hope you'll never meddle with it!"

I never intended to, and I told him so. One reason was Mamie Merrill.

"Don't take that girl matter too hard, either. It's better to have it come to you early in life than later. It's painful—I know that—and you have my sympathy. Still, you're young, and that means that there is a possibility of a cure. I'm sure she's a nice girl, beautiful, and with wonderful eyes?"

"Yes!"

Now that she was gone, she seemed even more beautiful than she did that night on the porch.

"Buck up! Don't let your mind dwell on your troubles. Go fishing with your two friends."

Somehow I liked the Snake Feeder better and better every minute.

A sensation that it must be late came over me, and I asked the Snake Feeder what time it was. He looked at his gold watch. I had five minutes to get home and into bed!

I said good night hurriedly, and ran up the alleys. I could have saved time by taking the street, but I was getting too big for that. Somehow I felt older and more responsible. I guess my experience with Mamie Merrill had aged me.

### VIII

A COUPLE of weeks later—and in all that time I wasn't able to see Mamie Merrill—Dewey, Squank, and I planned to go fishing very early in the morning. The Old Sycamore wasn't as good a place as it had been, and we decided that it was because we got there too late in the day. Near the end of summer fish always bite the best just after daylight; so we agreed to start at four o'clock. Dewey promised to awaken me, and we two would get Squank.

I went to bed early, and it was just as well that I did, because Dewey was so afraid of oversleeping that he came for me at half past three. It wasn't even light yet, and he had a hard time getting me awake; but finally he pitched a rock through the window.

Squank was just coming out of the kitchen when we got to his house. The bait was already dug, and we weren't delayed. We had enough food for breakfast and lunch, and we intended to eat as soon as we started fishing.

The urge of the stream on us, we trotted the entire three miles. Early as we were, however, we were not the first ones there. Our ears told us that as we approached. So that was why the Old Sycamore was failing in its yield of fish!

We were angry, but we didn't come up with a rush. The voices we heard were those of adults, so we sneaked up cautiously. It was well that we did so, for they weren't fishermen.

Seated in a circle, with a lantern casting sickly gleams, though it was broad daylight now, were Will Wilson and half a dozen others. Among them was Charlie Mechant. He was not the trim, slightly supercilious, carefully groomed teller that we saw in the Union National Bank. His clothing was mussed, and so was his black hair. His troubled eyes had dark smudges beneath them, and his face was haggard. His hands were unsteady, and he had trouble in picking up the cards that Wilson dealt to him.

Will Wilson was seated cross-legged, and in the hollow made by his limbs was a heap of bills weighted down by neat piles of silver. Some of the other men had money in front of them, or stuck in the tops of their shoes.

Doc Jimminson, the veterinarian, had a two-dollar bill behind his ear. We knew why. Two-dollar bills were held to be unlucky, and the recipient of one, to avoid the curse, had to tear off the lower left-hand corner, throw it away, and rub the remainder behind his left ear.

In front of Charlie Mechant there was nothing.

So intent were the men on the game that they did not notice our arrival. We three stood there, forgetful of why we had come, and equally forgetful of concealment, our fish poles in our hands.

As the deal began, each man tossed money into the center of the circle. Charlie Mechant searched through his pockets with his shaky hands, drew out a few crumpled bills, and threw them with the rest.

When the players had received their cards, they fanned them out carefully. Then Doc Jimminson took a ten-dollar bill from his shoe, and threw it in.

"I'll open her for ten," he announced.

Four of the other men folded up their cards and laid them on the grass. It was then Charlie Mechant's turn.

"Let me have another hundred, Will," he asked, licking his dry lips.

"Give me an I. O. U., and I'll make out a note later," replied the gambler, folding his cards together before picking up the money.

Even with the hundred taken out of his pile, there seemed to be plenty left.

"I'll raise you ten, doc," said Charlie, putting in twenty dollars.

"And I'll make it an even fifty to draw cards," added Wilson, dropping five ten-dollar bills.

Doc Jimminson studied his hand. Then he placed forty dollars in the middle. Charlie put in thirty.

"Cards?" asked Wilson.

Doc and Charlie each took two. Wilson, after looking at his hand for a long time, also took two.

"I think I'll hold a kicker myself," he said, as he flipped out the cards.

"I'll begin her easy," said the doctor, who had squinted at the corners of his cards. "I want to see what the cat drug in for you fellows. Ten dollars!"

"Fifty," remarked Charlie, his voice steady.

"Trail," said Wilson.

"Call," said Doc Jimminson, adding forty dollars to his bet.

Then they laid down their hands.

Doc had three kings. Wilson laid down three little treys, and Charlie started to claw in the money as he showed three aces.

"Just a minute, Mechant!" interrupted Wilson. "Five cards make a hand. Here are my kickers!"

He put two sevens beside the three treys, making a full house.

Charlie's face was green. He started to say something, but couldn't. He looked as if he had been hit in the stomach.

"I'm clean," said Doc Jimminson, rising and lighting a long, thin cigar—a stogy, the kind he always smoked. "And I'll catch the very devil for being out all night!"

Charlie Mechant got up also, his clothes wrinkled and grass-stained, and an old, drawn look on his face.

"What's your hurry, Mechant?" asked Will Wilson. "We haven't fixed that note out yet."

Charlie took a form from his pocket. Wilson filled it out with a fountain pen trimmed with gold, and banded it to Charlie.

Charlie looked at the paper, horror in his eyes.

"I didn't lose that much money to-night!" he exclaimed. "A hundred was all I got to-night!"

"Right, but I'm tired of holding your I. O. U.'s for the rest of it. Can't collect on I. O. U.'s. A note means something. I have to look after every dollar, now that your friend Tom Spiers has closed me up. You've got three months to raise the cash, young man. If you don't, I'll turn that note into your own bank for collection. I had that string in mind when I didn't take my account away because of that meddling Spiers—damn him! You know what old Billy Goat Burns would do if he thought one of his employees was gambling! Sign right here."

For a moment we thought Charlie would be man enough to resist. He kept looking at Wilson, who held the pen and paper toward him, and at last he took it and signed his name.

"Let me have ten more, Will," he pleaded, handing back the note.

"What do you want it for—to take Nelly Miller out buggy riding?"

Charlie Mechant turned red and merely grinned.

"The river road's a fine drive this time of year," continued Wilson, a leer on his face. "Lots of shady places, and few travelers; and a pretty girl like her—"

"My board is due to-day, Will," interrupted Mechant weakly.

"You're a lucky dog! She is a pretty girl," continued Wilson, stowing the note in a big yellow wallet which he took from an inside pocket. "Your board will have to wait, Charlie. This bank is closed for the day."

He leafed the bills, which he had picked up from the grass, into a neat sheaf, placed them in the wallet, and then put that receptacle away, buttoning his coat over it.

Charlie turned dejectedly. Wilson's tone was final.

After he had gone, the gambler reached for the lantern, and saw us. Our interest in what was happening had made us forget caution utterly. We were standing right out in the open, though places of concealment, within easy seeing distance and ear-shot, were abundant.

Without changing his expression, and with his steady black eyes holding us, he took from his hip pocket a great, gleaming revolver, which held enormous cartridges.

"Come here!" he commanded.

Despite the orders our brains were issuing to our legs to run in another direction, his will pulled us nearer to him.

"See this gun?" he demanded, pointing the weapon at us, his forefinger on the trigger. "I'll blow your brains out if you say anything about me—even a peep. Are you kids going to tell Gabriel White?"

The answer was obvious. Terrified not alone by the size and potentialities of that revolver, but also by the ferocious look of the man who held it, we gave our most sacred words, our hearts trembling against our ribs.

Will Wilson put the revolver back, blew out the lantern, and followed the others.

We could still feel ourselves bored by his eyes, long after he was out of sight. We baited our hooks mechanically, spat on them, and cast them into the water; but we couldn't concentrate on fishing. When we should have been intent on our bobbies, our attention was distracted by a feeling that some one was peering at us from the bushes.

"Let's give it up," said Squank, while it was still early in the forenoon.

With relief we retrieved our lines and started back to town. We didn't hurry on our return trip. We loitered along the way, and followed the river bank instead of taking the road. We didn't want to meet Will Wilson and his party.

We passed the old house where the marshal had taken the Red Man. He was there still, because the woman was out in front, chopping kindling. She didn't look up at us, though she must have heard us. The muddy flood records were still on the house, but the place was cleaner, and there were curtains at the windows.

As we went by the Union National, we saw Charlie Mechant in his cage, as usual. He looked a little pale, and had on a different suit; but we felt easier.

Tom Spiers was standing in the big plate glass window, and he waved at us and smiled. I felt sorry for him. The fact that Charlie Mechant hadn't resented Will Wilson's words about Nelly Miller gave them an evil meaning.

Gabriel White drove by, and a flush of guilt went over me as he flourished his buggy whip at us, not in a menacing manner—we were fully cognizant of the code of the whip—but in a friendly way. Afterward we admitted that our consciences pricked us, for Will Wilson was plainly out-

witting Gabriel by playing poker up the river, instead of in his gambling room.

But we thought of that pistol and that look!

"He'd kill us sure, if we told," said Dewey.

"I'd like to, but I don't dare," said Squank.

"So would I," I agreed; "but I don't want to die."

"He shot Em Richards," added Dewey, "and got out after five years, because he had a pull. We'd better keep our mouths shut."

We did.

It wasn't long, however, before Will Wil-

son was back on the South Side. Before frost crimsoned the trees and school started, we saw him at his old place beside the stairway, standing there like a black spider in front of his web, nodding and whispering to men who went upstairs.

His case had come up, and he had pleaded guilty. The judge fined him a thousand dollars, with the alternative of six months in the workhouse, and he paid. Mayor Valley, over the protests of Gabriel White, gave him a chance to make it back.

We thought it would not take Will Wilson very long. We had seen him deposit those thick rolls of bills in the Union National Bank.

*(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

### LET'S GO AWAY!

LET's go away, dear—  
Just us two—  
Out of the gray, dear,  
Into the blue;  
From crowded places  
That fetter wings  
To open spaces  
And glad green things.

We will be vagrants,  
You and I,  
Out 'neath the fragrance  
Of God's pure sky;  
Sharing the pleasure  
That nature yields  
In heaped up treasure  
Of woods and fields.

Hither and thither—  
You with me—  
Caring not whither  
Our path may be;  
With winds that favor  
And kindly sun,  
And all life's savor  
To hearten one!

Let's go away, dear—  
Just us two—  
Out of the gray, dear,  
Into the blue;  
From crowded places  
That fetter wings  
To open spaces  
And glad green things!

*Malcolm Douglas*



# The Discovery

A CURIOUS DIFFERENCE OF OPINION IN REGARD TO THE  
DRAMATIC ABILITY OF A YOUNG ACTRESS

By Leighton Osmun

IT was Albert Harley's business to select casts for the plays produced by Pohlman, Inc., and to stage-manage them during the early days of rehearsal—before Sam Pohlman or his brother Herman took charge. This evening, as he paused in the stage doorway to light his pipe, he reflected gloomily that he had had the devil of a day.

In spite of twenty years with the Pohlmans, from usher at their first theater to his present position, and in spite of his efforts to adopt a hard-boiled attitude—his own expression—toward his work, Harley still possessed the same sensitive, soft-hearted, eager nature that he had had when, as a boy, he had been irresistibly drawn to the world of the theater.

All he had heard the day long was:

"But my good Lord, Bert—casting three plays, and not a part for me!"

"Three plays!" he thought bitterly. "Yes, if this were in the old days, when we had eighteen or twenty people in a cast—didn't think we had a show, otherwise—good, full-bodied plays then! Look at them now—ten people, six people—once only three!"

He shook his head moodily. A casting director's life was not a happy one.

Harley was absolutely conscientious in his casting. No matter how it tore his heart to refuse an applicant, he did refuse if he thought the actor inadequate to the rôle. There was a part in one of these three plays which he had not been able to fill. He had stood out against friend after friend, appeal after appeal. He was weary to his soul.

He stepped out into the August heat of the alley, and plodded toward the street. Then, just when his mind was at low ebb, and it seemed as if in all the world there was nothing worth while, he made his discovery.

Harley had an ambition which rivaled even his desire to become a producer himself, so that no heavy-handed Pohlman could ruin the painstaking deftness of his work—and that was to discover a genius, an unknown, who would prove to be a great star, a star who would be to this country and the world of art what Bernhardt was to France and the world of art.

Some sixth sense told him that here was a real actress before she had said ten words, as she stepped out from the shadows of the alley to intercept him and to hand him a letter. He moved over to where an arc light sent its rays into the gloom, and read:

DEAR BERT:

Give Miss Haddon a chance. I believe she has ability. Regards, Tod.

Tod Browling—let's see—why, Tod was out on the Pacific Coast now, with "Snow-bound" No. 2 company.

"Experience?" Harley remembered himself just in time, and put on a forbidding frown.

"Two months in stock in Oakland." Lord, what a voice! "A little while at the Alcazar, in San Francisco." Rich and deep, with a peculiar vibrant quality. "Three seasons with the Majestic, in Los Angeles." Magnetism—by George, fairly oozing it! "Oh, Mr. Harley, if you would only give me even a walk-on part, so that I could say I'd had experience on Broadway!" Personality—great Shakespeare, reeking with it! "You don't know how I—"

Harley interrupted her sternly.

"What did you play in stock—leads?"

"Leads—character parts—everything. If you would only—"

"Come with me," he said abruptly.

Leading the way back to the dark and deserted stage, he turned on a single bulb on a high standard, and handed her a side.

"Look over a few pages—the part of *Violet*. Then read me the lines. *Violet*," he explained, "is the daughter of a wealthy and ultrasophisticated family. The piece is a divorce drama—a thing called 'Irons.' I'll cue you."

"I understand," she said.

He paced up and down, excited. Twenty years of contact with the stage had not destroyed his excitement over a first reading. Lord, what possibilities, what infinite possibilities, lay beyond it!

He could look at her now—he hadn't dared to in the alley, fearing that she might read the expression in his eyes, despite his frown. By George, she had looks, too! And those hands, those long, artistic fingers—the whole bag of tricks!

"I'm ready," she said at last.

"Let's see, that's the scene with the butler." He picked up another side from a pile on the table. "I'll take his lines. All set—begin!"

The dialogue was commonplace enough:

VIOLET—"Well, William!"

WILLIAM—"Yes, Miss Violet?"

VIOLET—"Is mother home? Have you seen her?"

WILLIAM—"I haven't, Miss Violet."

VIOLET (*Crossing L.*)—"William, I'm worried. There's no one else I can talk to but you. I—William, I don't know what to think. I—"

"That's enough," said Harley at this point.

"Oh, but won't you let me—"

"You may report here for rehearsal at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"You mean I—"

Thank Heaven he could smile now! He did—a smile which lighted up his face, and drew into being hundreds of tiny lines around his eyes.

"I like your reading. I'm glad to give you a chance at the part. Of course, I can only try you out—can't promise it will be permanent, but I think you can do it. Take that side home with you. Go over it, but don't try to memorize yet. Just absorb the lines. Here's the script of the whole play—take that, and get the general idea. Please be here promptly at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"I can't begin to thank you," she began with a little gasp. "I—"

He interrupted with a wave of his hand which she evidently interpreted as dismissal. She said good night, turned, and made her way out.

Harley watched her go, slender, graceful, young. Then he put off the light, and walked over to the Lambs, where he lived.

## II

THE first rehearsal of "Irons" was purely informal. There were seven in the cast—a husband, the star; his wife, the lead; their daughter; the butler; a maid; the wife's mother, and the other man. No sets were built yet. The cast sat around in a semicircle on nondescript chairs, and read their lines, each as his or her cues indicated.

The author, Richard Lathrop, stopped a reader from time to time to point out the precise value of a line. When he did this, he always prefaced his remarks by a deprecatory cough—it was his first play—removed his glasses, and sat leaning slightly forward. Sometimes an actor asked a question of him, but more often of the star, Henry Merritt, or of Harley. Harley himself put a question to the author now and then, but for the most part just listened and watched anxiously.

They were his flock. Except for the star, he had engaged them all. When one of them read a line with more than usual felicity, he glanced at Merritt, to see if he had noticed; but Merritt, tall, a trifle gray about the temples, dignified, was immersed in his own part, waiting merely for his cues.

So, as a matter of fact, were they all. The author smiled at some of the laugh lines and glanced around the circle, but no one else did.

Yes, they were Harley's flock, and he was loyal to them all, but he could not keep his eyes from straying to Miss Haddon. She bent over her side with a frown of concentration on her delicately cut features. Her brown hair, escaping from under her toque, played over her forehead and temples.

"By Shakespeare!" he said to himself. "She'll knock 'em cold!"

He wondered how the rest could keep their eyes from her.

At lunch time, Thrums, who played the butler—an actor of the old school, who had succeeded in adapting himself to the new sufficiently to play minor parts—strolled over to the director.

"Old son, really now—how about a little advance? Think the Pohlmanns would stand for it? Wouldn't break the firm, would it?"

"I might arrange it," Harley admitted. "Come over here, Fred," he added.

He simply had to talk to some one. They

went up stage and perched on a *papier-mâché* railing.

"What's on your mind, old son?"

"Fred, how does Miss Hadden strike you?"

"Seems like a nice girl. Why?"

"I mean her reading—her voice, and all that."

"Well, I'm not one who pretends to be able to judge from a first reading, old son—never did; but I didn't see anything particularly the matter with it. I didn't, really."

"I mean," Harley returned impatiently, "hasn't she got a marvelous voice, a wonderful delivery, and personality—magnetism, and all that?"

"Oh!" The old actor looked at Harley curiously. Then, with just the suspicion of a twinkle in eyes, he hastened along the blazed trail. "Old son," he ended, "I think you've got a find!"

As the days went by, it gradually spread through the company that Harley had a find in Miss Haddon. Thrums retailed to him what they all said. Harley developed the habit of inviting the old-timer to dinner every night. He had to talk to some one, and he didn't want to talk to any one else yet.

"She has the same quality," Thrums told him, "that Clara Morris had at her age. Old son, she'll knock 'em for a goal!"

She was always grateful for suggestions, always eager to learn, a hard worker. The second day of rehearsals Harley took her out to lunch. He wanted to run over the scene that they were to do that afternoon, so that she would have a firm grip on it from the beginning. She insisted on paying for her own luncheon, but when she opened her purse, there were only a few stray dimes and nickels in it. She was embarrassed and vexed, but Harley made light of it by telling her that she was a real actress now, and actresses never had any money.

After this he took her daily, and saw that she ate good, nourishing food. She was a little under weight, he thought.

So far he had rehearsed the company entirely alone. Sam Pohlman was in Europe, and Herman was at home, nursing a cold. Harley nearly always had the breaking in of a play—the mechanical part, the movement of the characters, the creation of business, and all that. He always endeavored, during this time, to get the company far enough along, well enough grounded in

the finer points, so that when the dreaded day of the Pohlman advent did come, all his work could not be undone.

Sometimes, but very rarely, his selection of some member of the cast would be disapproved—generally by Sam. He was glad that Sam was in Europe, and he would have only Herman, the more tractable of the two, to deal with; yet if Herman were still suffering with a cold when he put in his appearance, he might prove unruly. You never could tell. The question was, what would he say about Miss Haddon, an unknown, with no Broadway record?

Harley lived in a whirlwind of anxiety and anticipation, but the rehearsals progressed smoothly.

"Ada," he said to Miss Threnody, the white-haired woman who played the mother, "would you mind taking that cross again?"

"Look here, Harley, old chap!" It was the star speaking. "I don't like that cross. Far from me to be egotistical, but it screens me just as I am reading my line. That's an important line, d'ye see? Plants the fact that I have a doubt of myself—you understand that!"

"Couldn't I cross farther up stage, Bert, and start a little earlier, so as to get beyond Henry—you see?"

Harley turned to Merritt.

"Wouldn't that be all right, Henry? You see, I've got to get Ada over before Miss Haddon makes her entrance. That's her first entrance."

"Well, even that hardly covers the point, old chap. You see, on an important line like that, I should have the stage. Everybody else should be—er—static. I don't in the least wish, however"—he smiled his wintry smile—"to interfere with Miss Haddon's entrance."

"If I might offer a suggestion," the author said, "why couldn't Miss Threnody cross down to this corner—down stage?"

"Lathrop," the star observed mildly, "you're a rattling good author, but a rotten stage manager. You're fired!"

They both laughed.

"Do I have to enter just then, Mr. Harley?" Miss Haddon asked nervously. "Couldn't I wait until—"

"No," said Harley firmly. "Your entrance stands—with your permission, Henry."

"Oh, surely, surely!" The star smiled his wintry smile again. "My quarrel is with my old friend Ada. Her cross hits me

in the eye and ruffles my sensibilities. Come on, now, Ada—let's do battle over this thing!"

It was all very friendly—a wonderful cast to handle. Harley beamed with pride—good play, too. He told the author so.

"Nice little piece, Mr. Lathrop! Ought to do well."

"Thank you," said Lathrop.

But Harley couldn't quite understand why there was not more comment about Miss Haddon. Thrums told him a good deal, but it was all secondhand. Why did nobody else speak to him about her?

Professional jealousy didn't mean much to Harley. He had seen cases of it, of course—rank cases—but not often. And in this company—no, it wasn't that. He puzzled over it a good deal.

One day he overtook Miss Threnody as she was walking out to Broadway.

"Look here, Ada, what's your opinion of Miss Haddon?"

"A very nice girl, Bert. You must teach her to use her hands, though. It isn't awkwardness, but they're sometimes at variance with the emotion she's supposed to be portraying."

"But her hands are wonderful, Ada!" he burst out. "Great Shakespeare, I can't keep my eyes off them!"

She smiled, gave his shoulder a little reassuring pat, and turned north. They had reached the corner of Broadway, and he was going south.

"I wouldn't have thought it of Ada!" he said to himself moodily.

Thrums, waiting for him in front of the Lambs, cheered him immensely.

"In that big scene in the third act, old son, she has the quality of Duse!"

At luncheon, the next day, she was very quiet. Harley wondered whether she was feeling the lack of the congratulations that she so richly deserved.

At last she said:

"Mr. Harley, tell me honestly, how am I doing?"

"Splendidly, Miss Haddon, splendidly! Lots to learn yet—of course you know that, but—well, splendidly!"

She looked at him doubtfully, then asked:

"Well enough, do you think, for Mr. Pohlman to let me stay on?"

"Certainly," he answered crisply. A wild desire to boast came over him. "When I O. K. any one, that settles it!"

It was on this day that he was led to

tell her of his past life—of his struggles upward from being an usher, of his trials, of the time when he left the Pohlmans and they asked him to come back. She listened sympathetically, encouraging him with questions.

Then they talked about the producing game. Some of her remarks about that were pretty shrewd. By Shakespeare, the girl had a head on her!

All the time he was talking, one side of his mind was trying to analyze his emotions. They couldn't be analyzed except by going back away into the past—the first time he had talked to a star. Then, and then only, had he felt as he felt to-day—the terrific upswelling of admiration, almost awe. Harley felt now as he had then—that he was in the presence of some one more than human, of finer clay, different.

"Yes, that's it," he told himself. "She's different!"

### III

THE dreaded day of the Pohlman invasion had arrived.

"Go ahead!" said Herman, as he lowered his bulky body into the back seat center aisle left.

The play began. When anything pleased the great man, he signified his pleasure by a fat grunt. When he was displeased, he roared out in a deep voice on a descending scale:

"No—no—no—no!"

Once he broke into the middle of a scene with—

"Try that again, Miss Threnody. Miss Threnody, an old actress like you should know better than to speak so light. Emphasize it. Get your lines over. Make the people in the balcony know that you mean them."

"But, Mr. Pohlman"—Miss Threnody advanced to the front of the stage—"that is a tentative line. It's not meant to be emphatic."

"You see, Mr. Pohlman," Lathrop seconded her, "the psychology of this scene—"

"What do I care if it has psychology and tentative if I can't hear it?" demanded Pohlman. "Let me hear it, and then I can tell!"

Miss Threnody read the lines over as Herman wished. Harley groaned.

Herman, however, didn't interrupt once during Miss Haddon's scenes. He merely looked at her without expression from un-



der his heavy brows. Harley couldn't tell what the magnate thought, and—a coward for once in his life—he didn't dare to ask.

Seven hours saw the rehearsal through.

"Come with me," Herman said, and led the way to the elevator in the lobby.

He did not speak again until he was seated in his office, with Harley standing at the other side of the desk.

"Now what about this here Miss Haddon? How did you happen to cast her?"

"She brought a letter from Tod Browling."

"What good's that?"

"No good, but I tried her out in the part, and—what's the matter with her?"

"Nothing, only she can't act."

"Can't act?" Harley was stricken speechless.

"Hasn't a chance, Bert! Nice liddle girl," Pohlman rumbled on, "nice to look at, but can't act."

"Oh, come now, Herman, you're off—away off!"

"Why should I be off? I watched her, didn't I?"

"Well, so have I, for that matter."

"Fire her," Herman said heavily. "Get Miss Yates—she can do it. This one ain't got the style."

Harley's temper was rising.

"Why, she's a ringer for the part!"

"All right, then—you say she's all right, I say she ain't. Fire her!"

"I absolutely refuse to fire her, Herman, and that's flat. By Shakespeare, I won't do it! Miss Yates—why, she'd make a monkey out of that part! Why, look here, Herman, this girl has poise and refinement. She—"

"What do I care for that," Herman interrupted, "if she can't act?"

"She can act."

"Well, well, maybe she can. Fire her, anyway."

"I refuse," Harley said. "If she goes, I—resign."

There was a silence, while the two men looked at each other. Harley was mentally calculating whether Herman needed his services too badly at the present moment to let him go. What Herman was thinking he could not tell.

Herman looked at Harley with his heavy-lidded eyes half closed. When he spoke, however, it was with a flicker of that dry humor of which he was fond.

"Pohlman, Inc., don't accept resignations, Bert. When we don't like you, we fire you without resignations."

"I'm fired, then?" Harley asked, but with the beginnings of a grin at the corners of his mouth.

"Not so fast! You've been with us twenty years, Bert." Herman leaned back in his chair and folded his hands on his stomach. "Twenty years is a long time to talk about getting fired over a liddle fight about a girl, hey? We got a liddle fight about a girl—well, that's natural, ain't it, in this business? All right, but we don't break up twenty years for that, Bert!"

Harley completed his grin.

"You're right, Herman, but I can't let her go. I've staked my reputation on her!"

"Well, then, if you can't, you can't, Bert—that's something else again. Why didn't you say that in the first place, instead of talking about resignations? But she falls down on the first night, and then where goes your reputation? Answer me that, eh, Bert!"

"I'm not worrying about that," Harley said.

"If you're not worrying about it, then why should I worry about it, Bert? It's a liddle part, after all. The show goes on just the same if she kills it or don't kill it. Have it your own way, Bert. We stay friends, and not get up a row about a girl, eh?"

Harley thanked his chief, but he left the office shaken. Herman sometimes had rare flashes—was this one?

During the next rehearsal, the last one before the dress rehearsal, he watched Miss Haddon like a hawk. He could come only to one conclusion—she was perfect. Every line told, every gesture held, her stage presence—well, there was only one word to be applied to her, and that was "genius."

The play opened out of town, at Stamford. It was to play there two nights, then in Atlantic City for a week, and it would be brought into New York on the following Tuesday.

The Stamford opening was a triumph. The show went over with a bang. Even the usual crowd of slaughterers up from New York conceded it a hit, and some went so far as to apply the magic words "smash hit." The next morning's local paper gave a splendid write-up. Harley had asked the critic, a decent young chap, to say a word about Miss Haddon. He

devoted a whole paragraph to her, and spilled adjectives.

The girl was radiant. On the second night she played with more fire than she had yet shown. After her one big scene—it was in the third act—she got a generous round of applause.

Henry Merritt said to Harley:

"Really, old chap, I think you have a find in Miss Haddon!"

Atlantic City, and a repetition of Stamford. The house manager asked:

"Say, Bert, who's the cute kid you've got playing the daughter?"

Harley wanted to slap the fellow. Instead, he said:

"She's a comer, Sims. I discovered her myself."

"You ought to get her under contract—personal contract, I mean."

The idea offended Harley. He turned and walked away.

The week was a big success. The receipts increased from night to night. The audiences, ever more friendly, applauded more heartily, demanded more and more curtains. There was a rumor that the New York ticket brokers, on the strength of the Atlantic City showing, were negotiating for a block of seats for eight weeks ahead—the first buy of the season.

Everybody was on a high wave of happiness. Even Merritt's wintry smile became almost expansive. He told Harley again that Miss Haddon was a find. Thrums ran out of superlatives.

Harley glowed with triumph all the early part of the week, but on Friday, four days before the New York opening, an immense melancholia descended upon his spirits. After the first night, there would probably be one rehearsal, and then his connection with the play would cease. Another play would go into rehearsal on Wednesday afternoon.

He met her on the boardwalk. They talked a little while, and then she said in her low, musical voice:

"I can never thank you enough, Mr. Harley. It's been a miracle to me, your kindness—your patience!"

"I have been proud," he said soberly, "and I shall be more proud. On Wednesday morning you'll be on the theatrical map. In a year, or perhaps two years, you'll be a star—I hope to Heaven," he added, "under the Pohlman management!"

After this they were silent. He was

happy with a poignant happiness. For three weeks they had been together, with the tie of loved work between them. She had leaned on him, asked his advice, listened to him—she, the great, the glorious!

"There's something I ought to tell you," she said at last; "but, no—not until Wednesday."

"Is that an appointment?" he suggested, striving for lightness. "Suppose we make it luncheon?"

"I'd love it!"

"At the Rex, then, where we had our first luncheon together."

#### IV

NEW YORK and the first night, with sixty critics filling a block on the middle aisle, and an air of critical sophistication permeating the atmosphere—this was the test.

The first act went well. There was real applause at the end. One of the second line critics was heard to say:

"Damned good stuff!"

The second act went still better. There was more applause at the end, besides some sprinkled through the body of the act. Laugh lines brought laughs, drama reaped its reward of tense interest. There were five curtain calls.

The third act got away with a rush. The audience seemed suddenly to throw off the last vestige of its suspicious mood, and to awake to a realization that it was to be worthily entertained. It was a warm house.

Harley watched from the wings with a contented smile. In this act Miss Haddon had her big chance—the scene and exit which had gained applause at every performance in Stamford and Atlantic City.

His pose grew rigid. She was beginning. He stared, his eyes ravished, his ears ravished, his soul ravished.

"Genius!" he breathed.

She was beginning her exit line:

"Then—good night!"

She took her exit. Merritt held the stage for a second. Not a sound, not a ripple, not an isolated handclap!

Had Harley become suddenly deaf? No, for he could hear Merritt picking up his cue. Good God, what had happened?

He would go to her at once. No, he would wait till Merritt came off, and then he could carry the star's assurances to her, as well as his own.

Merritt strolled off.

"Henry, for Heaven's sake, what was the trouble with Miss Haddon's scene?"

"Didn't get over, dear boy. Don't ask me why not."

Harley, feeling that he was in a nightmare, went to her dressing room, but she had gone.

The great New York dailies varied in their criticisms. According to one expert or another, the play was strong stuff—mild but satisfying—marred by lack of humor—a trifle spoiled by injection of false humor. It ought to be good for a year, declared one prophet; it might last a month, opined another.

All this was the usual disagreement among the Olympians, but there was one word that sprang at Harley's eyes in type seemingly blacker than the rest—"miscast." He saw it in the first paper he opened. Like a witches' chorus it ran through the rest—the part of the daughter, badly miscast.

Harley reached the theater in a bewilderment bordering on panic. A rehearsal had been called for ten o'clock. Miss Threnody was the first to put in an appearance. He hurried to meet her.

"Have you seen the notices?"

"Very good, I thought."

"But—"

A boy interrupted.

"Telephone from Mr. Pohlman. He's sending around Miss Yates. He said you'd know what to do."

The boy went off, whistling.

Harley's heart sank. He gazed at Miss Threnody almost piteously.

"Tell me the truth," he said. "What's this about Miss Haddon?"

"My dear Bert!" she replied, smiling at him.

"Please!" he said desperately. "I've got to know!"

His face was wrinkled into lines of distress. Her smile faded.

"I think you will know—very soon."

"What do you mean? How can I know? Here I go and dig up a real genius, and this rotten Broadway crowd turns her down!"

"I can only repeat, my dear Bert, that you'll know very soon. If you don't by to-night's performance, come to me, and I'll tell you."

"I can't wait until to-night. I've got to know now!"

"Then make it a luncheon engagement."

"I have a luncheon engagement."

"Ah!"

"But, look here, Ada—I'll come up to your place afterward—say two o'clock."

"All right! I'll be there. In the meantime, don't let Miss Haddon pity herself, Bert. Tell her the truth."

"But here, hold on, what is the truth? You—"

She shook her head, smiled at him, and turned away to meet Merritt.

Merritt and the author took upon their shoulders the burden of the rehearsal.

"Harley's gone to pieces," the star told Lathrop, and so between them they did Harley's work for him.

Harley could only marvel at Miss Haddon. By the Lord, she was taking it well! Her successor had come, and Miss Haddon was coaching her—showing her the business. They laughed together as over some jest.

"Don't forget that we have a luncheon engagement," Harley said, as soon as the rehearsal was over.

"Wait!" She drew him aside. The other members of the cast strolled out. "I couldn't bear to have you take me to luncheon until you knew," she said. "I've deceived you."

"Deceived me?"

"I never was in stock," she said evenly. "I've never been on the Pacific Coast. I took a course at a dramatic school here in New York. I had heard how difficult it was to get a part, so I lied; but I want you to believe that if I had ever thought of what it meant to you, I wouldn't have done it. Oh, I can never forgive myself for that! I know what they're saying—about your judgment."

"I'll prove that my judgment's right," he said grimly. "I'll put you in another part, and then you'll see!"

"No—I had a long talk with Miss Threnody after the performance last night. She's too kind to deceive me, and too wise not to know. I'm not an actress."

"Not an actress!"

"No, I've been mistaken, and you've been mistaken."

"How could I be mistaken? Why, I've been in this game for twenty years! The first time I saw you out in the alley, I—"

He stopped, perspiring. A word, unbidden, had jumped to his tongue. Good God, he had nearly said:

"I loved you!"

Suddenly he knew the truth. This, then, was what Miss Threnody had meant! Fool, fool!

There is an adage that fools rush in, and so forth. Harley took a step forward.

There is another adage, or ought to be, that a man can't be unselfish and thoughtful of others all his life, and then, in a minute, change. Harley pulled himself together. He had nothing to offer her. He wasn't even a full-fledged stage director. He was nearing forty. She had youth, beauty—everything!

She was looking at him with an odd little smile.

"I think I ought to tell you," she said, "that it was not Tod Browling's fault about that letter. I made him give it to me. He said you were the easiest one in New York to work such a game on, and—"

He started back, aghast.

"I?"

"He also said," she went on evenly, "that you had vision such as few directors have—that, given a free hand, you would be a great director—one of the greatest."

He stared at her, speechless.

"I want to give you a free hand," she continued; "but first I want to tell you something else."

She paused for a moment, the odd little smile still on her lips. Harley said nothing.

"I'm to be married soon," she went on. "I wanted to be sure, first, that I hadn't a career awaiting me. I see now that I was foolish; but, as it happens, it hasn't made any difference. Bob is as much interested in the stage as I am, only now we are going at it from a different angle. Bob has a good deal of money, and so have I. We've decided to form a producing company, and we want you to join us as a partner—a partner with a free hand in the staging end." She paused, then added: "You'll do it, won't you?"

"Great Shakespeare, but he—your—the one you call Bob—he doesn't know me!"

Miss Haddon rippled into one of her low laughs.

"Oh, yes, he does, better than you know yourself. You see, I've told him."

When Albert Harley, late that night, paused to light his pipe in the stage doorway, he reflected that life is a strange thing. Something had entered into his innermost soul, and then had gone away. That would leave a scar—always.

"But, great Shakespeare, a producing manager!"

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### HEAVEN ON EARTH

THERE may be song beyond the stars,  
Or colors rare at rainbow's end,  
But heaven's gates were prison bars  
Unless your heart beat there, my friend:  
As all the gardens of this earth,  
However gay with summer flowers,  
And all the joy of life and mirth  
Were Dead Sea fruit, unless warm showers  
Of sympathy in sorrow blend  
Your sentient soul with mine, my friend!

There may be ships on every sea—  
Seaworthy ships with compass true;  
But what if all should come to me,  
All sails unfurled, save only you?  
And what if blessed hands of God  
Held mine, yet held me high above  
This grass your human feet have trod—  
Too high for your dear human love?  
Oh, straightway from the eternal blue,  
Beloved, I'd fly to earth and you!

Anita Dudley



# Mary

## THE STORY OF TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

By John Scarry

**S**TREAMERS of cold morning mist were wreathed among the sighing chemara trees. Two motionless tweed-clad figures—a man and a girl—stood side by side. It was six o'clock in the morning at Tosari, the fashionable hill resort of Java, and they had come out from the hotel to see the sun rising in glory over Gunong Raung and the nearer heights of the Idjen Plateau.

At least, that was what they said. That was what the girl had told her husband, who had probably gone to sleep again. As a matter of fact, they had come out to be together. If it had been raining bucketfuls, as upon occasion it can rain at Tosari, they would have come out just the same.

Love! It had grown overwhelmingly upon them in the few months they had known each other. It was proving to be a torturing condition, wherein neither could say whether being together or staying apart was the more painful.

They stood side by side on a wooded slope that was hidden from the roadway behind them. Mary Whiting, boyishly slender and boyishly courageous, seemed to make tremendous pretense of being absorbed in the splendor that lay about her. Her eager face was turned to the eastern glow; her nostrils drank in the odors of the morning. Not a beautiful face was hers; her features were too irregular. There was an undeniable sprinkling of freckles across her nose and under her gray eyes; but Arthur Hemmick thought her the most attractive woman he had ever seen.

He stood tall above her. He tried not to look at her. He looked, instead, for the things she had taught him to see and appreciate—the blue haze of wood smoke in the trees around the native village, the sun's conflagration in the lowest layer of clouds, the flights of wild pigeons from green thicket to tangled watercourse.

But he saw nothing. He was blind, as he had been before Mary Whiting had given him vision.

Why?

Casting about for an explanation, it occurred to Hemmick that the determination he had forced upon himself now occupied all his being. How could his eyes be expected to see the details of nature? The next few minutes would tell the whole story of his life. He was going to have it out with Mary Whiting. He was going to ask her to decide.

"Mary!" he said at last.

The girl turned toward him. Eagerness still lived in her regard, but there was a hint of apprehension, too. She waited for him to go on.

"I've been thinking."

She nodded.

"So have I."

"Of course. We can't help it. We love each other. It's a funny thing, love is. I had never thought of it—hadn't expected it, really; and now it's come to me, like this—for another man's wife!"

Hemmick could feel that the agony in Mary Whiting's eyes only mirrored his own torment. He looked away from her, and stared far across the valley. There was a little interval of silence.

"Well," he continued flatly, "I'm ready to do whatever you say, Mary."

"You put the decision up to me?"

He nodded.

"You know what my decision would be—the next boat to Singapore, and then home, and the devil take everything else in the world! That's sure. I have got no backbone left. There's nothing left of me, except love."

The girl glanced up, but did not speak.

"We can't go on this way," Hemmick resumed hoarsely. "Mary"—his face was haggard in the early light—"you know

that we're only one jump away from something irrevocable. I don't know what has saved us these last few days." Suddenly he struck a tanned fist into his palm. "God!" he uttered bitterly. "Why couldn't he be a cad, or a bully, or a drunkard? Then I wouldn't hesitate. I wouldn't leave the decision to you. We'd go! We'd go, Mary, and I'd worship you forever!"

Mary Whiting dropped her face into both hands. The man saw a convulsive movement of her shoulders. It checked his vehemence, and he began to stammer swift self-reproach.

The girl's eyes were dry as she faced him again—dry, but dull with an expression of unutterable pain.

"We're killing each other," she said. "Can you go away, Arthur?"

The color drained from Hemmick's face.

"That's your decision?"

Mary nodded.

"It's got to be that," she went on. "You're right about the—something irrevocable; but there mustn't be. We couldn't do that, Arthur—you and I." A pleading note crept into her low tones. "Oh, I love you enough, but we can't be dishonest. And I can't leave Charlie. I can't hurt him. I never loved him, that's true; but he's good, and I know he loves me. So you'll go away?"

Hemmick made a slight affirmative sign. He could not speak.

"You can?" she pressed.

"Yes—I'll go down to Surabaya tonight. I'll telegraph the head office for a transfer—Batavia, Singapore, anywhere. They'll do it," he said dully.

Then he saw the girl dash the back of her hand across her eyes. It was borne to him that her suffering was no whit less than his own. She must not suffer—Mary! He must make it as easy as possible for her.

"And we'll get over this," he declared heartily. "You wait and see. A couple of years, perhaps, and we'll be laughing about the flirtation we had!"

"Flirtation?"

Hemmick made a gesture of hopelessness.

"I'll never laugh," was all he could say.

"Nor I."

Then Mary Whiting turned toward the path which led through the chemaras back to the roadway and the hotel. Hemmick tried to fall in beside her. It seemed to him as if he was making a conscious effort

to choke the words that were rising to his lips; but he failed.

"Mary—"

She faced him.

"Will you kiss me, Mary—once?"

He saw her come slowly forward. Her face was pale; the freckles he loved stood out darker and more distinct. His hands went to her arms, to her shoulders. There seemed to be something of terror in her bearing as she spoke.

"I can't say no. I haven't the strength. I want to kiss you. I want to, Arthur; but if I do, I know I shall ask you not to go away!"

Slowly he released her.

"Let's go, Mary," he said.

Together they climbed the slope. In some places the path was steep, and slippery with fallen chemara needles. Hemmick went ahead. Two or three times he half turned and gave a steadying hand to the girl. Once on the road, they held to the right, and followed a level path to the compound in front of the main building of the hotel.

"I don't want any breakfast," said Mary Whiting.

Without another word she went across to her bungalow.

## II

NOR did Hemmick want to eat; but sheer habit was taking him into the hotel and to the breakfast room.

He had not yet begun to feel the pain of his loss. Indeed, he could feel nothing. The situation was so unreal that he doubted the evidence of all his senses. If it only turned out to be a frightful nightmare! But no such luck. These steps were of stone, this flooring of wood—no dream stuffs!

Then he found himself among white-covered tables. A cheerful hail greeted him from one corner.

"Oh, Hemmick!"

Never was greeting less welcome. Even before looking Hemmick knew that Charlie Whiting was calling him—the last man in Java he wanted to see. A bewildered oath sprang to his lips, but there was no escape, no way of pretending he had not heard. Muttering, he went to Whiting's table.

In spite of everything, Hemmick had never descended to hating this husband of the woman he loved. No one in Java hated Charlie Whiting. He was a fat, good-na-

tured fellow, manager of the American Kapok Company's office in Surabaya. He was known to be stubborn, as a fat man often can be; but the worst Hemmick could say about him was that he could talk more on any subject than any American in the Far East.

"Gosh!" he began. "Fine pair of early birds, you and my wife! How do you get that way? I wouldn't go across the street to see the reddest sunrise there ever was; but I have to get up, anyhow. Fat chance I've got to sleep when Mary starts out! Where is she now?"

"Gone to her room."

"Huh! Sit down, Arthur—have breakfast here. The sausage is great. I like it with that cheese they get out from Holland. But the coffee—Lord! You'd think you'd get real coffee in Java, but the mud they hand out! What you going to do to-day?"

"I'm going down to Surabaya to-night."

Whiting looked up from his sausage in some surprise.

"Business?"

Hemmick nodded.

"But you won't go down till five o'clock," Whiting objected. "What you doing till then?"

The other was not to be caught. Whiting could stick like a leech, and Hemmick did not want Mary's husband at his heels all day. There would be murder done! So he mentally vetoed golf—the only sport Whiting ever attempted.

"Why, I'm going out for snipe. That'll give my boy a chance to get everything packed."

Whiting slapped his pudgy fingers on the table edge.

"Snipe! Fine! I'll go with you. You'll let me take a gun, won't you? You know, Arthur, I could hit 'em once—quail, duck, anything. Just what I want—a chance to prove my eye's still with me!"

Hemmick's mouth drew into a hard line.

"I'm going fast and far, Charlie," he warned. "Some other day, perhaps. To-day—well, to-day I've got a touch of liver to walk off; and when I walk, I run."

Whiting snorted.

"Oh, Lord, I'll keep up with you—don't you worry about that! You're afraid I'll outshoot you, that's what! Just give me your second-best gun. When do we start?"

"I'm off in five minutes."

"I'll be ready in three. All I've got to do is to sling on a pair of puttees. See

you at your bungalow. You've got plenty of shells?"

With that Charlie Whiting lumbered out of the breakfast room. Hemmick cursed and cursed under his breath. He had to curse; otherwise he would burst into insane laughter, or weeping. Charlie Whiting with him all day!

Hemmick hurried through his meal. If Whiting was so much as a minute late, he told himself that he would leave without him.

But Whiting was on time. Three minutes later the two men struck down from Tosari toward the rice swamps that lie under the shoulder of Mount Widodaren.

"What's in that leather case?" asked Whiting. "Field glasses?"

"Flask of brandy."

"Huh! No wonder you've got a touch of liver!"

Hemmick said never a word. He wondered if this could be punishment inflicted upon him for his love of Mary Whiting.

### III

THERE would be murder done! In some subtle fashion that despairing exaggeration was changing in Hemmick's mind into a definite statement of fact. Here was the clumsy husband of the woman he loved beyond his power to describe; and here was the howling wilderness.

"Jove!" he thought incredulously. "I must have a touch of liver, at that!"

Between Tosari and the rice swamps where flew the snipe lay some four miles of mountainous jungle. It was easy traveling at first, downhill. A thick-fringed creek about a mile from the hotel was the gunners' first obstacle; but Hemmick knew the locality, and found a ford without difficulty. After that came good going again for a quarter of a mile, until virgin forest blocked the way over the next ridge.

Here branches caught at them, and the up grades made Whiting gasp. Hemmick climbed like a fiend, or like a man trying to shake off a fiend; but Whiting kept at his heels. There was nothing of the quitter about the fat man.

A wild land—a district of wooded hills and rocky cliffs, of foaming, rushing streams and cascades, of tiny lakes—red-rimmed, deep blue against the surrounding jungle. A thousand chances to do a man to death without leaving a sign to betray the murderer!

Hemmick had never had a criminal urge in his life. He did not know how to handle the one that now possessed him. Angrily shaking his head, like a tormented buffalo, availed him nothing.

It occurred to the man that conversation might have some effect toward banishing his brain's fearsome guest. He battled his way around a jagged outcropping of rock, dug his heels deep on a precipitous slope, and issued through a belt of towering ironwoods upon the bank of a swollen creek.

"Tough going, eh?" he remarked. "It'll be better once we cross this *kali*."

"I hope it will," was Whiting's fervent response.

"Better let me take your gun. It's a case of jump or swim here."

Whiting took one look at the river and the causeway of stepping stones ahead of him. Then he handed over his gun without demur.

"If you don't think you can make it, turn back, Charlie," Hemmick advised. "You've got to be sure-footed. God knows what's downstream!"

"I'll make it," said Whiting; "but you go first."

Five, six zigzaggy jumps; Hemmick crossed the stream without difficulty.

He turned on the other side to watch Whiting. The man had already started across. His huge khaki-clad body loomed bigger than ever as he leaped from stone to stone. He had just accomplished what was for him no mean jump, and now stood precariously poised on one foot. All he had to do was keep going; but he made the mistake of looking too far ahead.

An expression of alarm froze on his countenance. His arms began to cut circles. His body was unprepared for other than forward movement, but his mind refused the succeeding flight. With a choking cry of surprise and fear he hovered for a second, then tumbled into the foam.

Hemmick flew into action. He shed boots, sun helmet, and guns as he ran. Not hesitating for a second, he plunged head first into the torrent.

Whiting was not a strong swimmer. Indeed, it was a wonder that Hemmick was able to keep himself afloat. There was a downward suck to the current that dragged him under water more than half the time. If it had been necessary for him to battle the stream at all, he probably could not have done it. As it was, however, he let

himself go, swimming as he got the chance. Presently, he was able to clutch Whiting's shock of thick hair.

The big man was not unconscious, but he had swallowed a lot of water, and his struggles had tired him. He was not able to help Hemmick's attempt to rescue him; nor, on the other hand, could he hinder it.

Hemmick kept his eyes open for a place to land. Somewhere, he figured, the current must swerve close to a calm pool near the shore. It seemed probable that he would be able to steer himself into the safety of the first backwater.

It was not to be so easy. Instead of receding, the river banks drew closer and closer together. The stream itself thrashed and roared in increasing fury, driving ahead with the force and speed of a hurricane. On and on it swept the two men between precipitous cliffs.

The situation was rapidly getting to be more than Hemmick had bargained for. He did not hear the roar of any waterfall ahead. The pounding of water all around him prevented glimpses into chasms to come; yet a premonition of worse buffeting entered his mind. Self-preservation seemed to demand that he should relinquish his hold on Whiting.

But he could never do that!

Hemmick's impossible thoughts of murder were gone from his mind. Curiously, he now knew in his heart that he would sooner let go of his own brother than he would of this husband of Mary Whiting's. The mere fact that he himself would find happiness in Whiting's death gave strength to his cramped fingers. Let him go? They would go together.

Then the current slid Hemmick upon an inclined rock in the middle of the river. All he knew for a minute was that he was no longer moving. Nor could he stand. His fingers still twined desperately in Whiting's hair; and Whiting's body whirled in the tug of the water.

Hemmick hardly dared to move, for the spray in his eyes prevented clear vision. Slowly, however, with a herculean effort, he dragged his limp companion upon the submerged shelf beside him.

Then he had a chance to look around. What he saw was appalling. Save for the fortunate trick of the river that had washed him upon the rock, both he and Whiting would have dropped some ten feet into a caldron of jagged rocks and boiling water.



No human being could have got out of it alive.

Even now their ultimate safety was doubtful. The rock on which he knelt was three or four inches under water, but Hemmick could see that it was no more than four feet square. On both sides of it thundered and raced ten-yard stretches of the river that had cast them up.

Hemmick gave his attention to Whiting, whom he was still holding fast. The man sagged limply, but he was not in a state of collapse. He gasped. Water ran out of his mouth. It was not long, however, until he could take care of himself. His head thundered toward Hemmick.

"All right, Whiting?"

"Sure!"

Then Whiting said nothing for two or three minutes. He was drawing deep lungfuls of air.

"We ought to be able to walk ashore," he managed at last. "I've drunk enough water to dry up any stream!"

Hemmick grunted and stared. A silent compliment arose within him for this man who could crack jokes on the very edge of death.

"Ah, you did it, Arthur! Thanks—for I'm an awful dub. How do we get out?"

"Wait till some one finds us, I guess."

"Fine! When 'll that be? Br-r-r! Wish I was wearing tweeds. This khaki's like paper."

"Have a spot of brandy?"

"No."

"It 'll warm you up."

"Pah!"

So they clung there. From time to time Hemmick made the woods ring with cries for help, in English or Malay.

Half an hour later the weather had changed. Great white clouds of mist started drifting up the stream, obscuring the sun and blanketing the two men in a clammy, cold covering. Then the clouds became one cloud, and that cloud stayed. Even Hemmick's tweeds were scant protection. Nowhere in the world can a man feel colder than in the tropics when the mercury drops below seventy degrees.

"Time for medicine," Hemmick declared. "Good thing I didn't have time to drop it!"

He opened the leather case on his belt, and produced a squat brandy flask. He offered it to Whiting, who shook his head.

"I don't drink."

"Don't be a damned fool!" said Hemmick sharply. "It 'll keep you from getting a chill."

"I'm not very cold."

"You're shivering."

"I'd rather shiver than drink that stuff."

Hemmick shrugged.

"It's here if you want it," he said.

Then he drank half the brandy, and put the flask back into its case.

#### IV

THERE followed an hour of acute discomfort, mental as well as physical, for Hemmick was losing the instinctive unselfishness that had carried him into the river after Whiting. The brandy episode rankled. The blockhead! He should have let the stubborn fool drown!

That brought back his earlier aberrations. He tried to shut them out of his mind, but they returned persistently. In strange inward turmoil, Hemmick wondered if he was drunk. Could he be so low as to consider killing a man?

Suddenly, before he knew it, he found himself setting his foot in such a position that a single thrust with it would push Whiting back into the stream; but Mary Whiting's eyes deterred him. Mary! The thought of her made him sane again. He twisted away from Whiting, trembling.

Then, on the bank, a shouting pierced the cloud.

"Tuan! Tuan!"

With the help of Whiting's shoulder, Hemmick got carefully to his feet. He could see no movement, but he knew the visibility was better for the native ashore.

"Ayoh, man—tooloong!" he bellowed above the noise of the boiling river. "Kassi bamboo!"

"Saya, tuan!"

Whiting had no comment to make. He was undoubtedly too cold.

For a while Hemmick listened to the staccato of *parang* strokes on a bamboo stem; but it was ten minutes before the native dropped it across into the white man's eager grasp. Hemmick jammed the five-inch butt against the rock, under water, and in such fashion that the force of the stream would hold it the more firmly—or so he thought.

"Go to it, Charlie!"

"It 'll hold?"

"It wouldn't break with four times your weight. Go ahead!"

Whiting edged into the water. He straddled the bamboo, and began hitching himself toward shore.

Hemmick watched the rock, where the butt was submerged. Suddenly he saw the butt slowly rolling up toward him; and suddenly he decided that it was not his fault. If the butt came up, it came up.

The native was holding the other end. Let Whiting cling fast and pull himself in—or drown. He never could do it, with his pudgy fingers; but it was none of Hemmick's affair.

Another inch and the butt would slip. Mary! Shuddering, Hemmick jammed both heels down on the bamboo and checked its upward progress.

Presently, through the riot in his brain, he heard Whiting's voice.

"All right, Arthur! Come across!"

Two hours later, utterly spent, they both reached the hotel.

"You still intend to go down?" asked Whiting.

"Directly."

"Huh! Glad I'm not going! I'll tell Mary you saved my life—for you sure did, Arthur. Boy, I'll never forget it! See you in Surabaya, of course."

"Of course," Hemmick lied. He hoped to be gone before the Whitings got down from their holiday. "And, Charlie," he concluded earnestly, "you take a good stiff hot drink, and get under the blankets."

"Oh, I'm all right!"

Hemmick went into his bungalow. Well, that agony was over. There would be no more of it—no farewells—nothing. He would just go, as she had asked him to do. Mary! Thank God she had come to his side there in the river! Murder—ugh!

His boy had packed everything except a linen suit for the journey to Surabaya; but there were plenty of rugs. Hemmick took a hot bath, a cold shower, and a

stinging drink of brandy. Then he let his boy take the wheel and break all speed laws down through Pasoeroean and Porong to Surabaya.

In the morning he went down to the office. Jenkins, his assistant in the Pennsylvania Oil Company, met him at the door.

"Hello, Hemmick! What the deuce are you back for?"

"Sick of it."

"When 'd you come down?"

"Yesterday evening."

"Then you haven't heard the news?"

Hemmick gave his colleague a sharp look of inquiry.

"Whiting's dead," said Jenkins. "Just got a telephone from the Kapok Company. Seems he got a soaking, and pneumonia got him last night. They're burying him this morning."

Hemmick sank into the nearest chair.

## V

Four days later Mary Whiting came down to Surabaya to sail for the States. The American Kapok Company had arranged all details of her passage. Hemmick had no idea what to do. He had no doubt about her love for him, but he hesitated to intrude his own love. Still, he had to see her.

"You saved my life," she said. "He told me."

"Mary, it was because you were beside me all the time."

She nodded. She seemed to understand.

"You'll be home on furlough next year?"

"And I'm coming to you," he blurted.

Mary did not speak, and she did not smile; but as the deck echoed with the cry of "*Niet-passagiers van boord*," Hemmick saw a look in the girl's eyes that gave promise of happiness immeasurably above his worth.

## BLUE WORLDS

Your eyes hold two worlds, sky and sea—  
Blue worlds for me.

Although futility's a sapphire knife  
To fashion life;

Although I know you will not hear,  
Each newer year

I'll keep my skies and oceans blue  
For you!

Mary Louise Mable

# His Remarkable Future

THE STORY OF A RAPTUREOUS BUT SOMEWHAT TUMULTUOUS  
ENGAGEMENT

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

"HAVEN'T you any umbrella?" asked Hardy, with a frown.

"I have one," answered Miss Patterson, "but not here."

She was dignified, he was somewhat severe. Both were important, preoccupied, adult persons, full of business concerns; nevertheless, they did not quite know how to proceed with the conversation. They stood side by side in the lobby of the office building, looking not at all at each other, but at the steady and violent rain. Miss Patterson was reluctant to walk off in such a downpour, and Hardy was determined that she should not.

"Silly kid!" he thought. "In that flimsy suit and those fool shoes!"

Any number of other girls ran past, some with newspapers over their hats, some laughing, some gravely worried, but he was not perturbed by them. They could stand it. No other living girl was so peculiarly fragile as Miss Patterson, or beset with so many dangers.

"I think it will stop," said she.

This annoyed him. She was trying to make light of a most serious situation.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because it always does stop," she said.

"At least, it always has, in the past."

He turned his head to look at her, and he grew a little dizzy. In the bleak light of that dismal day, Miss Patterson seemed to glow with a strange radiance. Her light hair was like a nimbus under her hat, her blue eyes were lambent, and she chose just that moment to make the color deepen in her cheeks. It was not fair!

"I'll get a taxi," he said.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "Please don't! I live miles and miles uptown."

"Doesn't matter," said Hardy, and off he darted.

He stopped a cab with the air of a highwayman, and returned to Miss Patterson. As he put her into the vehicle, a curious change came over them. Hardy ceased to be masterful and severe, and Miss Patterson was no longer dignified. They looked at each other steadily, with a strange sort of despair.

"Look here!" said Hardy, in an uncertain voice. "Can't I come with you?"

"Oh, no!" cried she. "Oh, no! Oh, you'd better not!"

But they both knew that he was going with her, that he must, that the inevitable moment had come, the moment foreseen by both of them all through the winter.

"What's the address?" he asked.

That was the last thing needed. Now he knew where the human, unofficial Miss Patterson lived. She was disassociated from business now. She was not a typist, but a girl.

She seemed aware of all this, for, as he got into the cab beside her, she looked at him in a new way—a look so bright, so clear, so gentle!

"Look here!" he said. "I—I don't want to be a nuisance. If you'd really rather I didn't come—"

She only shook her head. If she had tried to speak, she would have ended in tears.

He didn't know that he, too, had a new look—that his young face had grown pale and strained, his eyes dark with his great fear and his great hope. And this was the splendid, vainglorious Mr. Hardy from the import department, the young man of whom great things were expected, who was to be made assistant buyer when Mr. Hallock left at the end of the year.

The other girls had talked about him a good deal, for he was a figure to capture

the imagination—a handsome boy, swaggering a little in the honest pride of his young manhood; only twenty-three, and going to be made assistant buyer!

"You know," he said, "I've often wanted to—to have a little talk with you. I—I often noticed you."

"Did you?" said Miss Patterson, ready to laugh through her unshed tears, for he needn't have troubled to tell her that.

"But you see," he went on, "I didn't know—I couldn't tell whether you—"

She was very glad to hear that, because sometimes she had been afraid that he could tell, could read in her face what was in her heart.

"You know, you're so different from any one else," he said. "Every time I saw you, I—whenever I saw you, it seemed—that is, I thought you were so different from any one else."

He stopped, aware that he was doing very badly, and filled with horror at his own idiotic words. She would think he was a fool.

Yet how could he possibly convey to this ethereal, fragile, and unworldly creature any idea of his own tempestuous love without alarming and offending her? He had no business to love her. It was a gross impertinence. She was an angel, and he was nothing but a clumsy—

The taxi turned a corner sharply, and he was flung sidewise, so that his shoulder brushed hers.

"I'm sorry!" he cried earnestly. "I couldn't help it!"

"But you're soaking wet!" said Miss Patterson.

Her gloved hand rested on his shoulder, and her voice—no, impossible!

"You're not—crying?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, I am," said Miss Patterson. "I am. I can't bear to—to think of your getting so wet and catching a cold—just to get me a—a taxi!"

"But I shan't catch cold," said Hardy. He was trying to bear in mind that her words, her tears, were nothing but an expression of her wonderful kindness and humanity. She would be sorry for any one who got wet and caught a cold in her service. That was all that she meant—absolutely all. "I shan't catch cold," he went on. "I never do; but you—you see, you're so delicate—"

"I'm not!" said she. "Not a bit! But

I remember perfectly well that last February you had the most—oh, the most awful cold!"

"Edith!" cried he, astounded, overwhelmed by this confession. "You remember that?"

Miss Patterson suddenly drew away, and ceased weeping.

"Well, yes," she admitted. "I—yes, I remember."

A silence.

"Then you must—must feel a little interested in me," said Hardy.

Silence.

"I hope you do," added Hardy.

The worst silence of all.

"Why do you hope that?" she asked, in a blank, small voice.

"Because I—ever since the first time I saw you, I thought perhaps you'd noticed."

"Noticed what?" inquired Miss Patterson, and he fancied that there was a shade of coldness in her voice. He was in despair. Of course she had no idea what he was driving at, he was so appallingly clumsy and stupid about it. He must do better than this! He drew a long breath.

"My prospects are pretty good," he remarked. "They're going to make me assistant buyer at the end of the year."

"So I've heard," said she, and this time there was no mistaking the coldness in her tone.

"I didn't say that to boast," he assured her anxiously. "I only wanted to tell you because—I wanted you to know that I—"

"I shouldn't blame you for boasting," said Miss Patterson, in a polite, formal way. "Every one says you have a remarkable future before you."

"Not without you!" he cried. "I don't want any future without you! Oh, Edith, I don't know how to tell you—"

The head of the auditing department, in which Miss Patterson worked, often praised her for the quickness with which she grasped new ideas. This praise seemed justified, for she understood Hardy without further explanation.

Nevertheless, they both had an enormous amount of explaining to do. All the way uptown they were engaged in explaining to each other, with the greatest earnestness, just how they felt, why they felt so, and when they had begun to feel so. When they reached the depressing West Side street where Edith lived, they hadn't half finished.



The taxi stopped, and the driver turned around, so that they couldn't go on explaining, or even say good-by; but Hardy went into the dingy little vestibule with his Edith.

"Darling girl!" he said. "Shan't I come upstairs with you and see your aunt?"

She turned away.

"I'd rather you didn't, Joe," she said. "Not just now, please!"

He was willing to do anything in the world she wanted, except to leave her; but that was almost impossible. She seemed to him so forlorn, so little and so young. The brightness had left her face now. She was downcast and pale.

"Edith!" he said. "Aren't you happy at home?"

"No, Joe, I'm not," she answered. "I'm wretched!"

When she saw what that did to him, how much it hurt him, she was overcome with remorse.

"Oh, but it doesn't matter—now!" she said. "Not now—when I have you. Really and truly, Joe, I don't care a bit!"

Her anxiety to reassure him, to send him away happy, touched Hardy almost beyond endurance. He had always been aware of something wistful, something a little sorrowful about her, like a shadow over her clear beauty. She had been the dearer to him for that. She was a thousand times dearer to him now because she was sad, and must look to him for her happiness. He meant to make her happy—at any cost!

## II

THOSE words, "at any cost," did not come consciously into Hardy's mind. He didn't really believe that happiness cost anything—or love, either. You found them, suddenly, on your way through life, and of course you had a right to keep what you found.

He did see difficulties, though. His prospects were good, but in his immediate present there were many things that troubled him.

His chief trouble was one which young fellows of twenty-three who want to get married have encountered before. It was money. His salary of twenty-five hundred a year was more than he needed for his own wants, and he had done a very sensible thing—he had begun buying stock in the company that employed him, turning in ten

dollars of his salary every week for this purpose. He had four hundred dollars saved in that way, but no one ever repented a folly more heartily than young Hardy now regretted his prudence.

He couldn't touch that money. He knew very well that one of Mr. Plummer's strongest reasons for promoting him was that infernal stock he was buying. If he were to sell it, or to stop his payments, Mr. Plummer would want to know why, and Hardy's prospects would be in jeopardy. He couldn't marry without those prospects, nor could he very well get married without the money.

Well, any wise and experienced person could solve that difficulty for him. He must wait. Even Edith, who was neither wise nor experienced, told him that. They were having lunch together a few days after their great discovery of happiness, and Hardy had been explaining the situation in detail.

"We'll have to wait," said Edith. "Anyhow—"

"No," said he. "I can't stand seeing you so miserable!"

"But I'd be a hundred times more miserable if I thought I was doing you any harm!" said Edith.

As soon as the words were spoken, she realized that she had made a serious mistake, and tried hastily to remedy it.

"I'm really not miserable, Joe!" she cried. "Not a bit!"

He knew better, though. Without even having seen her, he was becoming acquainted with Edith's aunt, and learning to appreciate her talent for making people miserable. Edith never told him about it. It wasn't her habit to complain, but to any one who watched her as Hardy did, the thing was obvious.

One evening, when he was walking to the Subway with her, she had to stop in the drug store to buy a bottle of "nerve tonic" at two dollars a bottle.

"You don't take that stuff, do you, Edith?" he had asked anxiously.

"Oh, no!" she replied. "It's for Aunt Bessie. She's in very poor health, you know."

"What's the matter with her?" Hardy bluntly inquired.

He did not fail to notice Edith's troubled face and rising color; and the answer that Aunt Bessie was "terribly nervous" seemed to him to explain a good deal.

Then he learned that Aunt Bessie was upset if Edith was a few minutes late in getting home, and that she would be still more painfully upset if Edith should even suggest going out in the evening.

"She's alone all day, you see," the girl explained, "and it does seem selfish to go out again."

"Oh, *very* selfish!" Hardy interrupted. "And what about Saturday afternoon and Sunday?"

"Well, you see, Joe, she's alone all week, and—and she hasn't any one but me. Anyhow, Joe, we see each other every day in the office, and we can have lunch together, can't we?"

He said nothing more just then, for he could see that Edith was unhappy and anxious. For those first few days even having lunch with her was almost too good to be true; but the day when Edith said they must wait, and Hardy said he wouldn't, was Monday, after he had spent a horrible Sunday without a glimpse of her.

"No," he said again. "We can't go on like this. I can't, anyhow."

Again she pointed out that they saw each other every day in the office, and could have lunch together. She added that they had only been engaged five days.

"I know," said he. "It would be all right if I could see you, but you won't let me come to your house, and you won't go out with me."

"But we see each other—"

"Yes, and we can have lunch together, for the next ten years, I suppose!" Hardy interrupted.

"It won't be anything like ten years, you silly boy! At the end of the year, when you—"

"Yes, and do you know what's going to happen then? They're going to send me to Europe, with Preble, for two months."

"Oh!" cried Edith.

For a moment she was silent, overcome by this news. Then she made a gallant attempt at a reasonable, calm, businesslike manner.

"But, after all—two months!" she said.

Her smile was a very poor one, and her voice betrayed her. Instead of helping her, Hardy became unmanageable.

"Look here!" he said. "September, October, November—that's three months that we can have lunch together. Then I'll be away for December and January; so perhaps after five months I may have a

chance to—kiss you once more, if your aunt doesn't mind. Five whole months, and you won't let me see you alone for five minutes!"

"Oh, Joe, darling! Do be reasonable!"

"You're a little too reasonable," said he. "If you really cared for me—"

There is no better way to begin a quarrel than with those classic words. Edith grew angry, but her anger was such a mild little thing compared to Hardy's that she took refuge in flight, and left him sitting alone in the restaurant. All was over!

That afternoon they had four hours to think over their words. When Edith came downstairs, Hardy was waiting for her in the lobby.

"Edith!" he said. "Edith! I don't know how I could have been such a brute! Edith, I can't—"

"Oh, Joe, you weren't! I know it must seem heartless to you for me to talk that way; but you don't understand, Joe!"

As they walked toward the Subway, she tried to tell him. It was the hottest hour of that sultry September day, and she looked so jaded, so pale, that he was frightened. He held her arm, his tall head bent, to catch every word, his eyes fixed on her face.

"You see," she said, "I owe so much to Aunt Bessie. She took me when I was a tiny girl, after mother died, and she gave up everything for me—everything, Joe! She used the little bit of money she had to send me to a good school, and when that was gone she went to work. That's what ruined her health—working in an office; and she did it for me, Joe. If she's a little—a little trying now, I—you do see, don't you, Joe?"

"Yes, my darling girl, I see," he answered, more gently than she had ever heard him speak before. "I think—see here, Edith! Could you spare time for a soda?"

She thought she could. They went into a shop near by, and sat down at a little table in a dark corner. He stretched out his hand toward hers, which lay on the table, but he drew it back again. He wasn't going to do anything that might bother her, never again. He would be patient, he would do anything in the world she wanted. He was sick with remorse and alarm at her pallor and fatigue.

"I'll do whatever you want, Edith," he said. "Only—I love you so! If you

would just tell me more about yourself! It's hard not to know."

It was her hand that grasped his.

"As if I didn't understand! Oh, Joe, I worried so awfully about you that time you got wet! If you had been sick, I couldn't have been with you. I didn't even know who there'd be to take care of you."

"Don't!" he said suddenly. "Please don't, little Edith! I don't need much taking care of. It's you! Do you mind telling me what—how you—how it is with you financially?"

She did tell him, readily and frankly, and he was appalled. She was supporting herself and her aunt on her meager salary. Two persons entirely dependent on this slip of a girl!

"Edith!" he said. "Won't you marry me now? My salary's enough for us to scrape along on."

Both her hands clasped his now.

"Joe, my own dearest, I can't!"

"We can take your aunt to live with us for a while, until I've got my raise."

"Joe, we can't!"

"I don't care how bad she is. If you can stand her, I can."

"You couldn't! Don't you see, Joe, that that would spoil everything? We couldn't start like that. But if you'd—"

"If I'd what?"

"Nothing!" she said hastily. "I'll tell you another time."

But instead of telling him, she left a note on his desk the next morning.

DEAR JOE:

I will marry you now, if you won't ask me to give up my job.

"I don't wonder you wrote it," said Hardy, when he met her for lunch.

"Joe, it's the only way!"

"It's not *my* way," said he.

She reminded him that he had promised her to do whatever she wanted, and he replied that he would do so—except in this instance.

"Well, I won't let you have the burden of taking care of Aunt Bessie," she told him. "It's bad enough for you to think of getting married, anyhow, when you're so young, and just at the beginning of a wonderful career—"

"Young, am I? Then what about you?" he asked. "No! When you marry me, you'll be done with offices. That's something I won't argue about."

She pretended to be angry, but in her heart she adored him when he was magnificent and arbitrary.

### III

"It isn't really a lie," said Edith. "I really do go to the French class."

"It's too near a lie to suit me," said Hardy bluntly. "I'm sick of this hole-and-corner business. It's—can't you see for yourself that it's degrading to both of us? Edith, can't we be honest about this? Let me go and see your aunt, and tell her the whole thing. If she makes a row, I dare say I can live through it."

"I dare say *you* could," Edith answered briefly.

They were coming near to one of the gates of Central Park. Their walk together was almost at an end—a walk which only a few weeks ago would have been a delight almost unsupportable, a thing to lie awake at night remembering, to think of all through a busy day. Now that rapture, that glamour, was gone. With all their love, their hope, their blind tenderness for each other, they were bitter at heart.

It was a wild, bright October evening. The moon seemed rocking in the fitful clouds, the wind sprang like a kitten along the paths after the dry leaves, the bare trees creaked stiff and resistant. All the world was in motion, restless, hurried. All things were free—except themselves. It was intolerable to Hardy, an affront to his fine young pride in himself, his magnificent assurance. It was petty, base, shameful!

"Edith!" he said suddenly. "I won't go on like this!"

She stopped short in the middle of the path.

"I'm tired of hearing that," she replied, in a queer, unsteady voice. "You're always saying that—always blaming me; and you know we've got to go on like this—or not go on at all!"

"We haven't. That's what I'm always trying to tell you," he said stormily. "We don't have to meet this way—in this beastly, lying way—pretending to your aunt that your French lesson is for two hours instead of one, so that we can have one hour a week alone together. Tell her! Let her be upset! She'll have to know some time. Then at least I can come to see you in your own place, decently and honorably."

"I will not tell her now! You don't

realize what it 'll mean to Aunt Bessie. You don't care. She hasn't any one but me. I *won't* tell her now, and let her have all that long time to think about—losing me. She's going to be happy as long as possible."

Hardy took her arm.

"Come on," he said, "or you'll be ten minutes late, and she'll have a nervous attack and keep you up all night, as usual!"

But when he felt how she was shivering in her thin jacket, a terrible compunction seized him.

"Oh, Edith!" he cried. "Edith, never mind all that! Darling little Edith, it's only *our* affair, after all! Let's get married now, before I go!"

"You know we can't," she said, with a sob. "Not when you're so obstinate and—and unkind. You know we couldn't manage for ourselves and Aunt Bessie, too, in any place where she'd be comfortable, just on your salary; and you're so unreasonable about my job!"

"Look here, Edith—I'll sell that blamed stock, and that 'll provide for Aunt Bessie until I've got my raise."

"You won't! You shan't!" She pulled her arm away from him, and roughly wiped away the tears running down her cheeks. "Don't you dare to mention such a thing! I'm not going to ruin your whole life just for—"

"Well, you've ruined it!" said Hardy. "I can tell you that, if it's any satisfaction to you. I don't care now what happens to me, or whether I go on or not. You've shown me how little you care for me. You've—Edith!"

She had started running along the path, but he easily overtook her. All at once their arms were about each other, Edith's wet cheek against his, and all their pain, their bitterness, lost in a passion of tenderness and remorse.

#### IV

STILL Hardy went about the office, magnificent as ever, very well aware of being a remarkable young fellow, who was to be made assistant buyer at twenty-three, a man talked about, admired, and envied. He was still proud of himself, still sure of himself, but some of the magic had gone out of it, some of the zest. He couldn't look forward to that trip to Europe with unmixed joy now.

Indeed, all the joys he had at this time

were so mixed with anxiety and impatience that he could scarcely recognize them. He dreaded leaving Edith. He imagined all sorts of misfortunes that might befall her in his absence. Sometimes he even resented his splendid future, because it so burdened and harassed the present. He wanted to live *now*, not to wait.

Worst of all was the humiliation he endured from their furtive and hasty meetings. He had never before in his life been furtive, or even cautious. He had lived boldly and rashly, in the light of day, and it hurt and angered him to do otherwise. He wanted to love boldly and rashly. He wanted to be proud of his love.

Well, he wasn't proud; he was ashamed.

He couldn't understand Edith's viewpoint. Her life had been so repressed, so weighted down by unjust and inordinate demands upon her, that she was thankful for the briefest minutes of happiness. If she could meet Hardy for ten minutes on a street corner, she was joyous for those ten minutes—when he would let her be. He tried to let her. He would watch her coming toward him—such a gallant little figure!—and he would make up his mind to be tender and considerate; but when she was with him, when he saw her ill dressed and ill nourished, and couldn't help her, when he saw her glance at her watch even when he was speaking, his good resolutions only too often vanished, and he reproached her bitterly.

She didn't endure his reproaches meekly. He wouldn't have loved her, if she had. On the contrary, she replied to him vigorously, and so many, many times they had left each other in anger, to be paid for later by hours of remorse.

Neither of them was quarrelsome by nature, nor was there any lack of real harmony between them. They were both generous, quick to forgive, eager to understand, passionately loyal to each other. Every one of their disagreements would have been quickly adjusted and forgotten, if they had had time; but they never did have time, and neither did this fellow of twenty-three and this girl of twenty have any greater amount of patience and ripe wisdom than others of their age.

Sometimes a sort of panic seized them, and they felt it necessary to "explain." They had fallen into the habit of taking a little more than the allotted hour for lunch. Though Edith had been solemnly warned



by her superior, she found it impossible to leave Joe in the middle of a speech. He was so unreasonable about her always being in a hurry.

So there was lunch almost every day, and the walk to the Subway, and that hour stolen from the French class once a week, all through October and November, until the trip to Europe was only a few weeks ahead of them. Mr. Plummer hadn't actually told Hardy he was to go, but the thing was understood. Mr. Loomis, the buyer, was taking pains to train him, and had once or twice said such things as:

"You'll see how that is for yourself, Hardy, when you're in France."

"It 'll probably be before Christmas," said Hardy. "The idea is that I'm not to be told until Hallock is gone, because I might slack up on my present work. Silly, childish way to do—as if it was a treat for a good boy!"

"Well, it will be a treat, won't it?" said Edith. "You've always—"

He looked across the table at her. The cold air had brought no color into her cheeks. She looked weary, downcast. He could see that her smile was an effort, and in her eyes was the look that he couldn't bear.

"No!" he said. "I wish to Heaven I wasn't going! I mean it! If I have to leave you like this—"

"Joe," she began, and was silent for a minute. "I—I know it's selfish of me; but—oh, Joe, when I think of your going away—"

Mr. Plummer, who was also taking lunch in that restaurant, saw his promising young man lean across the table and lay his hand on that of Miss Patterson from the auditing department.

"Too bad!" thought Mr. Plummer. "A boy with a remarkable future before him—and getting himself entangled before he's begun! Too bad! Too bad!"

Fortunately, however, he could not hear what monstrous folly the boy spoke.

"I won't go, Edith! I'll stay here with you. Nothing else counts with me but you—only you. I'll—"

"I want you to go, Joe, darling," said she, with quivering lips; "but I thought—only I know you wouldn't! I—if we could just get married before you go, and not tell any one till you come back—just so that we'd really belong to each other—then it wouldn't be so hard!"

And Hardy, the bold, the rash, the magnificent, who hated anything secret and furtive, looked only once at her dear face, and agreed.

## V

"YOU'RE late again, Miss Patterson," said Mr. Dunne.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Edith. "I'll really try not to again."

But she didn't look sorry. She sat down at her desk, flushed and a little out of breath, and, to Mr. Dunne's great displeasure, there was a smile hovering about her lips.

"Miss Patterson," said he, "I'm afraid this is once too often."

Edith looked up in alarm.

"But, you see—" she began, and stopped.

She couldn't explain to Mr. Dunne that this was a most pardonable lateness, and not at all likely to happen again. Going to the City Hall for a marriage license wouldn't occupy much of her time in the future. Thinking of this, she smiled again—and lost her job. Mr. Dunne didn't like people who smiled when they were late.

So it happened that just when she badly needed a smile she hadn't one. The wretched little imitation she gave to Hardy, an hour later, didn't deceive him for an instant. He stopped beside her desk—a thing he had never done before.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, and would not be put off.

No use to tell him that he shouldn't stand there and talk to her! He knew that very well, and he didn't care. A mighty rage filled him. Edith, his Edith, his own girl, to be discharged and humiliated like this!

"Get on your hat and jacket," he commanded, "and come on!"

"Joe! You mustn't—"

"Look here!" said he. "I won't have you here like this. If Dunne told you to go, then go now. Good Lord! Haven't you any pride?"

She was too wretched to be angry at him. She did get on her hat and jacket, and, in full view of every one, Hardy walked out of the office with her at three o'clock on a busy afternoon.

"We'll go to the flat," he said, "and talk it over."

They had a flat of their own. Hardy had insisted upon this.

"We'll take it now," he had said; "and

whenever we see anything especially good in the way of furniture, we'll buy it. Then, when I come back, we'll have a place of our own all ready for us."

It wasn't quite what they wanted, but Hardy had very little money just then, and their only time for house hunting was what they had been able to pilfer from their lunch hour; so they had taken the first one that seemed at all suitable. It consisted of three tiny rooms in a remodeled house west of Central Park.

They had already become inordinately fond of this future home. To be sure, there was nothing in it except a barrel containing a Limoges dinner set, which Hardy had bought from a shipment received at the office; but Edith had made a flying visit and measured the windows for curtains, and after that she could look upon the place as her own.

This afternoon, when Hardy opened the door with his latchkey, the place was obviously a *future* home. It was bare, bleak, and dusty, with slanting sun rays falling across the ill laid board floor of what was going to be the sitting room.

The door closed behind them, and there they were, alone, with plenty of time for talking now, and neither of them said one word. Hardy began walking about. His footsteps made a loud and somehow a melancholy sound. His voice in the empty little rooms was not at all his confident office voice, but boyish, and, to Edith, terribly touching.

She sat down on the barrel, struggling against her despair and misery, while he moved about in the kitchen, mocked by a gas stove with no gas in it, and water taps that gave forth no water. She knew how he felt; she knew what he would say.

"But I won't!" she thought. "I'll get another job. I won't let him take care of Aunt Bessie now. I won't! I won't! Not now, when he's just beginning."

If she were making resolves in the sitting room, so was Hardy in the kitchen. He hadn't been singled out by Mr. Plummer because of his gentleness and consideration. He had a remarkable future because he was remarkably persistent and clear-sighted about getting his own way, and Edith was no match for him.

"No!" said he. "No more jobs! We'll tell your aunt *now*, and we'll get married to-morrow, as we planned, and we'll move in here."

"We can't, Joe. We haven't any furniture, you know—"

"Then we'll get it."

"And Aunt Bessie—"

"We'll see Aunt Bessie now. Look here, little Edith! It's got to be this way. I couldn't have my wife running about looking for a job. I couldn't go away and leave you working in a strange office. It was bad enough in the old place. Look here, Edith, don't you think you can be happy with me? Don't you love me enough?"

"I love you too much, Joe! It's not fair to you. You'll—oh, Joe, you'll have to sell your stock, and Mr. Plummer—"

"Edith," he said, "I've been thinking lately—I don't know how to put it very well—but it seems to me that maybe it's a mistake to live so much in the future. Suppose there wasn't any future—for us? Suppose something happened to one of us? Edith, I can't stand thinking of that! Look here! Let's just live now, and not be afraid of what's going to happen. Let's start this thing"—he stopped for a moment—"with courage and confidence," he finished.

She put her hand on his cheek and turned his head so that she could look into his honest, steady eyes.

"Let's!" she said, with a very unsteady little smile. "I feel that way, too, Joe. We'll begin this minute, and unpack the china, just so that we'll—we'll feel at home!"

## VI

HARDY turned his back upon Mr. Plummer, and looked out of the window. It was a cold, rainy day. The people far below on the street were hurrying by under umbrellas.

"In that case, Hardy," said Mr. Plummer, "I'm sorry, but—"

"Yes, sir," said Hardy.

He couldn't, at that moment, say anything more. Something had risen into his throat and silenced him. He would have liked to speak, to tell the man who had shown so kindly an interest in him that he regretted his hasty and violent words. He hadn't meant all that he said. He had come to tell Mr. Plummer that he wanted to sell his stock. He had listened, as patiently as he could, while his employer remonstrated with him. He had endured a pretty stiff lecture upon his recent slackness and lack of attention to work, because

he knew he deserved it; but when Mr. Plummer undertook to warn him about "entangling" himself with that "young woman in the auditing department," all his genuine respect for his chief had vanished in an overwhelming anger. That "young woman" was his Edith!

He didn't like, now, to recall what he had said.

"I'm sorry, Hardy," said Mr. Plummer again. He was looking at the boy with an odd expression on his lined face, a look half respectful, half sorrowful. As a man, he liked Hardy the better for his outburst, but as a business man he deplored it.

"I wish you the best of luck, my boy," he said. "Refer to me at any time."

"Thank you, sir," said Hardy.

Off he went, with his words of apology unsaid, with five years of friendly interest unrewarded, and with his own heart like lead. He walked through the office for the last time, and into the corridor, leaving so much behind him.

Edith was waiting for him in the lobby.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried. "I found a place uptown where they promised to deliver the furniture this afternoon. Imagine! And I got the dearest material for curtains! I brought a sample to show you."

She was opening her hand bag, but he stopped her.

"No, don't," he said curtly. "Not just now."

Here she was, chattering about curtains, after all that had happened! He remembered how he had left her the evening before, after a horrible interview with her aunt. He remembered her pitiful attempts to soothe and comfort that hysterical old

demon, and her anguish when she failed so utterly, and was told that if she married "that man" she would be cast off—except for the trifling communications necessary to continuing her support of the martyr.

"And I couldn't sleep for worrying about her!" he thought bitterly. "I thought she'd be ill, and look at her now—perfectly happy, talking about curtains!"

"Come on!" he said aloud, and then stopped, with a frown. "Haven't you any umbrella?" he asked.

"I have one," she replied, "but not here. It wasn't raining when I started."

"Edith!" he said suddenly. "Don't you remember?"

How could he have imagined that she was happy, or that her mind was filled with thoughts of curtains? That small, gallant, smiling thing, so pale, so troubled, with the shadow of her suffering dark in her eyes!

"It's nearly twelve, Joe," she said, looking at her watch. "We haven't much time."

"Oh, yes, we have!" he told her. "We have any amount of time, for I'm never going back there."

"Joe!" she cried. "Oh, Joe! Oh, no, no! Don't tell me you've—"

He drew a long breath, and then looked down at her with a grin.

"You've got a young man with a remarkably uncertain future," he said. "Never mind—we'll start a new future. Anyhow, I shan't have to go to Europe now, and leave you."

"Oh, Joe! What have I done?"

"I did it myself," he said sturdily, "and I'm glad. Thank Heaven, we've got time, now, for a nice, peaceful wedding!"

### YOUTH'S TRIUMPH

"THE last song is sung," cried the old man,  
 "And the last word is said!"  
 Then the upward fire of the dawn broke  
 And the banners of morn overhead

Led on the youth of creation,  
 And the sky that was gray turned gold,  
 And love grew as mighty as ever,  
 And the heart of adventure as bold!

Youth climbed to the stars on new pinions;  
 Youth waxed mighty and strong;  
 Youth bitted the thunder and rode it;  
 Youth sang a new song!

Harry Kemp

# Suspicion

## THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

**R**ICHARD SELLS sees little of his wife, who spends her time in quest of hectic pleasures with what she terms her "kennel of jazz hounds." When Della Sells sails for France with a party of her friends, her husband, disgusted with New York, seeks rest and quiet in the out-of-the-way village of Standish, close to the Connecticut shore of the Sound. Calling himself "Mr. Brown," he is taken in as a boarder by Peter Stayton, a retired skipper, whose daughter keeps house for him. Dorcas Stayton is a gentle, attractive girl, and Richard finds her companionship very pleasant.

One evening, when Peter has gone on an errand to New London, Richard and Dorcas go out in the girl's skiff. Their boat is stranded on a rocky flat by the falling tide, and they do not get home until three o'clock in the morning. This is reported to Peter, on his return, by old Rose Ruby, a neighbor who sometimes helps Dorcas with her housework. Furiously angry, the old skipper jumps to the worst possible conclusion, and decides that only by forcing the stranger to marry Dorcas can he wipe out the disgrace inflicted on his family. His certainty is increased by the fact that Richard announces that he must return to New York.

### VIII

**T**HE village lay in the ominous hush of the approaching storm. The elms about the common were motionless, their leaves drooping. It was as if the town held its breath, conserving its strength to combat the elemental furies that would soon be unleashed upon it.

Peter struck off across the common, returning with an automatic nod of his lowered head the jovial greetings that bombarded him. Down Maple Street he hurried, and up the steps of an ancient stone house affixed to an equally ancient church by an ivy-grown ligament.

"I want to see Mr. Beckwith, ma'am," he announced to the plump old housekeeper who beamed upon him from the doorway. "Jest tell him it's Pete Stayton who's come on a little matter of business—important business."

She led him into a dim parlor—a square, spacious, low-ceilinged room whose Colonial hauteur had been subject to the spasmodic improvements of the ambitious years until now its character was blended of half a dozen eras. The huge old fireplace was boarded up, and its mantel was nearly concealed by a pompous, round-bellied stove. Figured carpet stretched brightly over the

wide floor boards; golden oak stared impudently at mellow mahogany. A bunch of dried cat-tails, tied with faded yellow ribbon, stood in one corner.

In spite of the room's architectural and decorative inconsistencies, Peter was subdued by its air of piety—by the bulging plush Bible, with its enormous gilt clasp, prominently placed on the center table, and by the faded print of "The Last Supper" hanging over the organ. In the serene face of the Christ he sought and appeared to find approval of his fervid plans, so that his eyes, when they met the minister's, had lost something of their maniacal light. They were steadier, but no less determined.

"Well, Pete, how are you? Sophie told me your business was important, and I said to myself, 'Well, have old Pete's sins been riding him too hard?'"

They clasped hands warmly. Mr. Beckwith was a small, withered man with a bristling, bustling manner that grew more marked with the years, as if to offer tangible proof of the superiority of spirit over matter. His scorn for his more or less secularized brethren, and for their growing congregations of admiring liberalists, was manifest in his sermons. He lashed and exhorted his parishioners with the inflexible rod of the Old Testament—and loved and



comforted them with a heart as large and warm as his body was spare and chill. Sincerity, however, lent his pious bigotry a sort of dramatic majesty, and there was scarcely a service that did not see his little church packed to the doors.

He regarded Peter with a twinkle in his merry brown eyes, his hand pawing at his streaked beard, in anticipation of some peppy controversy, but his mirth found no reflection in that somber gaze.

"It ain't my sins that have brought me up here, parson," Peter explained quietly. "It's a—it's a weddin'."

"A wedding!" gushed the little parson. "A wedding! No! Not yours, Pete, after all these years? Don't tell me you've gone and—"

"No, no—ye know it ain't me!" Peter was trying desperately to rise to the minister's waggish mood. "It's Dorcas—my daughter."

"Dorcas! You don't say!" It was a cry of genuine delight. "Well, now, that is fine! So she's going to be married! No wonder you look as if you'd just buried your first mate at sea! It seems only yesterday she was running around here with her hair in pigtails—cute little rascal!" His eyes crinkled. "She'd have been a pretty nice girl if you hadn't brought her up such a little heathen, Pete. And now she's going to be married!"

"Yes," said Peter. "Now she's goin' to be married."

"Well, sit down, man. Sit down and tell me—who's the lucky man, and when is the wedding to be?"

Peter eased himself slowly into a plush-covered chair, spread his great, knobby hands on his knees, and bent forward.

"It—it's a city man's been stoppin' with us this summer. Likely ye've seen him around the village sometimes. And the weddin'—it's to-night."

"To-night?"

"To-night," Peter carefully repeated.

"But, man, why didn't you let me know before? When did they decide to get married? When did they get the license?"

"License!" repeated Peter, and again, with dawning alarm: "License! Why, they ain't got one. They—well, they jest decided to get married—jest this morning."

"Oh, well, then"—Mr. Beckwith thrust his hands deep into his pockets, swung one short leg over the other, and smiled genially upon his guest—"there won't be any

wedding *this* night. Seems to me, Pete, you're in a blessed hurry to get rid of your only child. Fine paternal attitude, I must say! But it won't work."

"Won't work!" Peter swallowed hard, striving to preserve his fixed smile. "Ye mean ye won't marry 'em to-night?"

"How can I? They've got to have a license. What's more, they've got to have it four or five days before I can perform the ceremony. That's the law, and you know it, Pete."

The old man stared stolidly before him, checkmated by this unexpected obstacle, prodding latent strategic resources to overcome it without revealing his daughter's guilty secret.

"Well, mebbe I did know it," he admitted belligerently; "but I know, too, that there ain't hardly any law ye can't reef to meet a squall."

The little minister was frankly puzzled—puzzled as much by the unnatural solemnity of the old man as by this unreasonable exhibition of obstinacy. His good-humored smile did not falter, however.

"Of course, I know what young people are, God bless them! They're always in a hurry—especially when they're in love; but I guess they can wait a few days, all right."

"But they can't! They can't wait, parson." Peter's lips were twitching under the ragged mustache. "They got to be married to-night."

"But I've just told you, Pete—"

"I don't care what ye jest told me," he bellowed. "Don't go talkin' to me about the law! Where's the law, when it comes to some of these here hurry-up weddin's and deathbed marriages you're always hearin' about, when there warn't no time fer licenses?"

"But those are emergencies. In such cases, when there hasn't been time for proper preparation, it's different—in this State, anyhow. The minister takes the entire responsibility upon himself—"

"There! I told ye!" Peter's hand came thumping down on his knee. "There ain't hardly any law ye can't take a reef in, jest like I said!"

"But it's not regular, Pete. No minister cares to marry a young couple under those circumstances. It's too heavy a responsibility. If subsequent events prove that it was in any way unwise, *he* is responsible."

"Yes, I know!" The old man's tone was

wheeling now. He bent swiftly forward and laid a hand on the minister's knee. "Ye won't have nothin' to be sorry about after *this* weddin'," he went on. "Ye'll marry my girl to-night, license or no license, parson, won't ye?"

"I tell you I can't do it, Pete. I'm sorry."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Peter largely. "Course ye can do it!"

"Sorry, but they'll have to wait and get their license," repeated the minister firmly, though his smile still held. "If it were a case of emergency—"

"Ain't I been tellin' ye that that's jest what it is?"

"No, Pete. You've told me nothing of the sort."

"Well, I tell ye now, then!" roared Peter. When he saw shocked wonder replace the little parson's benignant smile, he resumed his wheedling tone, though his voice shook. "It ain't that I want 'em to get married like this. I don't want to lose my girl; but what ye goin' to do when a young one takes it into her head all of a sudden that she's goin' to get married, an' threatens to go off and have it done by some parson ye don't know? What with him leavin' to-morrow—"

"You mean the young man is going away?"

The minister was regarding Peter intently now, and a trifle sadly. The old fisherman nodded emphatically.

"An' she jest bound to go along," he confided, with every appearance of plaintive resignation.

"Can't he wait for a few days?"

Peter's sly glance noted the breach he had made in the minister's reluctance, and he slipped in another wedge.

"Wait? They won't do it, I tell ye. An' how do I know who's goin' to marry 'em, if they go off like this? What father wants his child traipsin' off to some strange place, an' gettin' married by some strange parson? I can't budge her, she's that set."

It was noble dissimulation. Surely no one could look more guileless, more injured and appealing, than old Peter Stayton hunched forward on the little plush chair and pleading the cause of a wilful daughter; but the minister's penetrating gaze was not focused on the seamy old face of his importuning visitor. His was the business of souls, not of surfaces, however moving they might be; and Peter's soul was flying

its signal of distress from the depths of his hunted little blue eyes.

"Why does the young man have to leave so suddenly?" asked the parson quietly.

"Some business in the city—somethin' pressin', it seems; an' if they ain't married to-night, well—but ye *will* do it fer me, won't ye? Ye can see there's no time fer a license an' all that. Ye know how these young people be. Ye said yourself they was always in a hurry." He was almost whining. "All ye'll need is a prayer book, parson. Dorcas bein' so plumb set on gettin' married, I want some one I know to do the job, see?"

If Mr. Beckwith saw more than the old man had intended him to see, it was not so much that Peter's dissembling was lacking in finesse as that the clergyman's sagacity had been sharpened by years of conscientious probings. His smile had gone now, and his eyes were grave.

"If the matter were urgent enough—" he began, but Peter swept down upon the words.

"It is, man! God knows I wouldn't ask it of ye if it—if I—well, if it warn't. I promise ye, ye won't be sorry. I want them young folks to be married to-night under my own roof; and I want ye to do the business. Ye'll never regret it—never!"

The room was dim with the false gray twilight of the hastening storm.

"But we're going to have a bad bit of weather to-night, Pete. Why not bring Dorcas and her young man up right away, then, before the storm breaks?"

But Peter Stayton shook his shaggy head stubbornly.

"Under my roof! If it storms, ye can get a jitney from Gilfrey's. I'll pay fer it—glad to. I—ye see, we sort of planned to have the weddin' down there, right after supper."

"Well, Pete," said the minister, after another moment of silence, "I'll do it. I'll come along down as soon as I've had my supper. Will that do?"

"That 'll do fine, parson!"

They appeared to be all the words Pete could find at the moment and he said them huskily.

The little minister followed him to the door. Up and down the wide street the leaves were beginning to whisper among themselves, as if warning one another of the impending tempest. Something of the gloomy apprehension that overlay the vil-

lage was in the minister's brown eyes as he held out his hand to Peter and watched him start off down the path. Suddenly he called to him, and the old man turned.

"You forgot to tell me the young man's name, Pete."

"His name?" echoed Peter, and added, with a grin which he endeavored to make playful: "Oh, you'll hear his name all right enough, when the time comes!"

## IX

He went swiftly on through the thickening gloom, passing other hurrying figures, who flung prophesies over their shoulders to the effect that it was "blowin' up like a good three-day sou'easter." A woman called to him from a yard, where she was working in silent haste to retrieve the rugs and cushions put out for an airing. Farther down the road another cautious housewife was tilting her porch chairs against the wall of the house. The wind was blowing in from the sea in fitful gusts which laid the beach grass flat and thumped loose blinds about crazily.

As Peter turned into the beach road, he caught sight of Rose Ruby, her head swathed in a fringed shawl, her skirts flapping above wrinkled shoe tops, standing before the window of her dilapidated shack and tying the blinds together with bits of dirty rag. He hurried forward, calling to her hoarsely, but she slunk quickly into the house and pulled the door to after her.

Cursing under his breath, he pounded up the path and raised his voice.

"Open that door, ye rattlin' bag of bones, or I'll kick it in!"

The answer came back plaintively:

"What fer? What d'you want?"

"I want to speak with ye, that's what. Open her up, and quick, too!"

She presented him with the sharp tip of her nose squeezed through the smallest possible aperture, but he could see her eyes gleaming in the semidarkness behind her.

"Well, then, what you got to say, callin' me names?"

"Ain't a patch on what I'll call ye if ye don't mind what I'm tellin' ye, witch! I want ye to come down to my house, see? Watch fer the parson—Mr. Beckwith—an' when ye see him go by, step quick an' come after, or I'll come an' get ye!"

"But I can't. It's goin' to storm."

"An' a storm's nothin' to what 'll happen to ye if ye don't come, woman," an-

nounced Peter thunderously. "You're goin' to come along and finish up the job ye started this mornin'. You're goin' to see my girl married to-night. Surely"—with elaborate sarcasm—"ye won't stop away from a weddin' fer a little thing like rain, will ye?"

"A weddin'!" she squealed, and now the whole of her yellow grin was in evidence. "She goin' to marry him—after all? A weddin', hey?"

"Ye heard me!" boomed Peter. The hands that he had placed behind his back for safety were clapping and unclapping convulsively. "Jest watch out fer the parson goin' by, an', when ye see him, hustle along."

"Oh, I'll hustle, all right," she chuckled. "I'll be there—don't you worry!"

He left her chattering and cackling there on the wind-blown doorstep, and hurried on. He was smiling grimly when he turned into his own yard. What better bridesmaid could he have found than the woman who had already fouled the bride's good name? Oh, he was not without a sense of values—though he would not have thus defined his motives—when he added Rose Ruby as a final fitting touch to the wedding he had planned!

He found Dorcas hauling a great square of tarpaulin up from the cellar. She tossed it down to scold him spiritedly.

"Father! Where have you been? Now you hurry and fasten this over the Dorcas, or you'll break your back bailing her out after the storm."

"I'll do it, girl—I'll do it right off," he said, quietly enough, and gathered up the stuff. "Where's our star boarder, Dorie?"

"Upstairs, packing, I think."

"Packin', eh?" Pete echoed, moving off.

"Packin', is he?"

When the blinds were all fastened securely, and the captive launch protected from the storm, he followed her inside.

"Jest get supper a bit early to-night, girl," he commanded. "I don't recollect eatin' overmuch fer dinner, an' I'm pretty hungry."

"Well, then, of course, the great bear shall have his food," she replied, smiling, and went in search of her indispensable apron.

He watched her moving about from a far corner of the kitchen, where he had ensconced himself with a clumsy old Colt across his knees and a can of oil beside him

on the floor. The barrel of the old weapon was already beginning to give forth a blue sheen under the vigorous application of the oil-soaked rag in his hand.

"It always makes me nervous to see you fussing with that old thing," she told him, laying the silver beside the plates, and looking across at him with a line of anxiety between her eyes.

Peter's slow smile widened.

"Needn't make ye nervous, Dorie. Have to keep her oiled up, if she's goin' to be fit fer any use."

"But you know we never use the awful old thing."

"We-ell," he drawled, "ye never *can* tell when a gun 'll come in handy!"

The girl went back to her work, but presently he spoke again, still in his careless drawl:

"So we're goin' to lose our star boarder, eh, Dorie?"

She was breaking eggs for an omelet, her back toward him, but she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "He's going."

"Too bad!" commented Peter lazily.

"Too bad, ain't it?" he added, as she continued silent.

"Yes," she repeated.

"He seemed a nice sort of feller, Mr. Brown did. Nice and smooth his manner always was."

She was beating the eggs busily, and did not reply. A few enormous raindrops were leaping against the windows, like frightened emissaries of the marching gale behind them. The scarred old horse-chestnut tree, standing guard over the Dorcas, was tossing its half dead arms in terror beneath the gusty onslaught of wind.

"Like as not you're pleased to see him go," hazarded Peter nonchalantly, "what with the cookin' and the extra work."

Now he was rewarded. Her voice came, clear and indignant:

"He has never made any extra work, daddy. I never minded it; and as to the cooking, he's lots easier to please than you." She flashed him a reproachful glance. "You never heard me complain, did you?"

"No," admitted Peter grimly, and with one eye closed, so that he could the better regard the beautiful polish he had produced on the barrel of the old Colt. "No, I never heard ye complain, Dorie—I never did."

Moving about the tower room with the dumb, uncertain haste of one who responds

to instinct rather than to coherent thought, Richard was making his preparations for leaving Standish. His wardrobe trunk stood wide; his clothes lay heaped upon the bed and trailed across the chairs.

For hours he had been painstakingly struggling with the task before him, but his long fingers had become unaccountably clumsy. They seemed detached, something quite apart from the rest of him, insensible to the sharp agony in his heart. More than once he had stopped to regard them with dull impatience, or to curse softly at their impotence.

Then, too, he was forever finding himself, with trunk and bags forgotten, standing at the windows and peering through the mounting dusk across the water, toward the little rocky protuberance where he had lost his blithe ecstasy in discovering his love. It was a restless sea now, lashing itself into a foaming frenzy. He could picture the little island, engulfed, scourged by the insensate fury of the waves, even as his own relentless Nemesis was scourging him.

Again and again he prodded himself to activity, only to find himself, after a few moments of futile exertion, hunched dismally in the little Queen Anne chair, or peering once more across the churning water. He could hear the girl's voice assuring him that it had been her fault as much as his. He could see her face again as it had looked in the gray dawn—pale, wide-eyed, a little puzzled, with her rumpled hair wisping about her temples, her lips half parted in a smile.

Ah, her splendid self-possession had not withstood the emotional siege of that night's experience! Had she guessed? Could Richard have taken her into his arms and kissed the puzzled wonder from her eyes and love into them?

The thought shook him back once more to realities. Again he set diligently to work, to the tune of a dreary chant within him. He was going away—away from Dorcas, the woman he loved!

It was because he loved her that he was leaving. He was aware of a dumb wonder at this, and said it over carefully. He was leaving the woman he loved because he loved her.

Della might turn that into one of her neat paradoxes. Richard thought with what avidity his wife's jazz hounds would pounce upon it. There was enough humor in the tale to supply them with a full eve-



ning's entertainment. In it they would find all their pet bromides—a rural setting, a humble country girl, gingham, naïveté, love in the moonlight, sacrifices. How they would rock with mirth!

His thoughts swerved again to the trunk that he should even now be packing. He was leaving. Would Dorcas think his abrupt departure odd? No—blithe child that she was, how should she suspect that he loved her?

It occurred to him that he might have found a palliative in speech. How sweet her sympathy would have been!

The thought gave birth to a sudden impulse, and he hurried to the desk. He would write to her. Surely there would be no harm in that! Surely, after their long weeks of companionship, he owed her some explanation of his sudden leave-taking!

He knew it to be a pitifully weak defense, but he picked up his pen and began to write feverishly.

DORCAS, MY DARLING:

For the first and last time I am going to call you this. I don't know why I should write to you, unless it is that I am too small and selfish to deny myself the solace of putting on paper the things I so long to say to you.

First of all I want to tell you that out of all the years that have gone, and all those that are still to come, these weeks with you mark the fullest measure of my happiness. They are the only happy weeks that I have known since my childhood. I came to you a lonely and unhappy man, with the taste of bitter disillusion in my mouth. I leave you, still lonely, still unhappy, but with the memory of you tucked away, a little torch-light in my heart that will serve to brighten the dark years ahead of me.

Dorcas, most beautiful of names—I love you! Some day you will know the full import of those three sublime words. Thank God, you have still to learn! Thank God, my own belated awakening has not affected you. That is why I am leaving like this, so that there will be no danger of your mistaking the blessed sympathy I know you will feel for me, for something of which I am unworthy—for something that I am not free to claim.

You took me into your home and gave me your friendship, which is the greatest treasure I have ever possessed. I have been happy here—happier, I believe, than any living man. Until last night I did not discover—blind fool that I was—that the source of my happiness was yourself; but last night I knew that I loved you—I who forfeited my right to love any woman as I love you, ten years ago, when I linked my destiny with another, to whom I am still bound by my marriage vows, if by nothing more.

For these ten years I have kept faith with myself and with the woman I married. I shall still keep faith, for how else should I dare to cherish the memory of you? You have lightened my burden—a burden whose weight I pray God you

may never know. I leave you with your image in my heart, and I must keep my heart clean, so that it will be a worthy shrine for that blessed memory.

You are everything that I have been seeking in life these many years—noble, beautiful, and pure. I am at your feet, and there I shall remain in spirit; but since that spirit dwells in flesh, I am going away from you.

I want you. I would gladly forfeit all the years that may still be my portion if I might claim you for my own; but the fates have decreed otherwise, and I must go, knowing that one day the gift of love will be yours, that one day some doubly blessed mortal will possess the priceless treasure I could not claim. Life is niggardly, but, if she can grant such a boon, I pray that the future may bring you all that you deserve. It is much to ask, but I do ask it for you.

Think of me sometimes, Dorcas—think of the blundering wretch who loved you, who would have died for you if the sacrifice would have availed you, and who perhaps atoned in part for his mistakes by leaving you. I love you! I love you! I love you! Farewell!

RICHARD.

His cheeks were burning and his heart was pounding heavily when he scrawled his name at the foot of the closely written page. Shaken out of his innate reserve, perhaps for the first time in his life, he dared not trust himself to read what he had written, but folded and slipped it into an envelope, wrote her name across the face, and propped the letter against the inkstand.

He was fumbling once more in the half packed trunk when her voice came up the stair well to him.

"Supper, Mr. Brown!"

Mr. Brown! Last night she had called him Richard, and had endowed the name with a pulsant significance it had not possessed before. He had a sudden revulsion against his fictitious identity. He had put a lie into her mouth!

He shook himself peremptorily. There was need for self-control now, for the casual cordiality of the summer boarder about to take polite leave of his temporary host.

In the kitchen, the adjustable lamp slung above the table was lighted and lowered to within a foot of the white cloth. All the homelike comfort of the big room seemed to have been drawn within that small, gay circle of light. It gleamed on the dishes and the shining silver, touched the old man's rugged features with a gentle glow, and brought a latent sheen of bronze into the girl's smooth head.

"Well," Richard said lightly, "it looks to me like one of these spectacular storms we read about."

"It's dirty weather, an' looks mighty

like a sou'easter," returned old Peter, diligently apportioning the omelet. "A sou'easter's likely to last three or four days. My father always said a sou'easter never quit—it jest wore itself out."

The girl, spooning little heaps of browned potatoes, did not raise her eyes, but she said pleasantly:

"Did you finish your packing all right? Dreadful job, isn't it?"

"No, I didn't," replied Richard. "I'm not very good at that sort of thing, I'm afraid—too clumsy."

"Why not let Dorcas help ye some?" Peter broke in eagerly. "Women are better when it comes to that sort of thing. Should have asked her before."

"Oh, no—that would be an imposition!"

"Imposition, your granny!" scoffed Peter genially. "Course she'll help—won't you, Dorie? After supper ye can go up and help Mr. Brown with his things, can't ye, girl? Why don't ye say something?"

Her throat and cheeks were crimson, and she did not raise her eyes when she spoke, but Peter's glowering gaze did not release her until she had promised.

"Of course—I'll be glad to help—of course," she said.

"That's more like it!" approved Peter, and heaved a great sigh. "Of course she'll help—and she's a good packer, Dorie is!"

Then the heavy silence that had overlain the noon meal settled down upon them once more. There was a good deal of clatter from Peter's knife and fork, but at the end of twenty minutes, when the girl rose to clear the plates away for the peaches and cake that were to follow the golden omelet, she looked disapprovingly at her father's plate.

"I thought you said you were hungry, daddy!" she said. "But none of us seem to have eaten much supper," she added with a nervous laugh.

"A storm," drawled Peter, with a sharp glance at his brooding guest, "most generally *does* take my appetite away. Don't it affect you that way, Mr. Brown?"

"Eh? Oh, yes," agreed Richard absently. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Now, Dorie," urged the old man, when they rose, and the girl began to gather up the dishes, "don't go botherin' about them things. Light Mr. Brown's lamp there, an' run upstairs an' give him a hand with his packin'."

She moved obediently across to the lamp

shelf. Richard found himself wondering at the old man's repeated and unusual use of his pseudonym; yet, even as he wondered, his irritation was swept away on a wave of guilty ecstasy. Dorcas was coming up to the tower room, and they would be alone together for a few exquisite moments. She would be near him, her fingers would touch his things, he might even—if he could bring it about casually enough—touch her hand. Further treasures, these, for his album of memory!

He took the lamp from her and followed her up the stairs, heedless of the lusty reverberation throughout the wide halls, deaf to the melancholy ululations in the chimneys. When he set the lamp down on the bureau, she regarded the cluttered room with genuine housewifely dismay.

"My gracious! You *are* in a mess, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I am," he admitted a bit unsteadily. His pulses had quickened at sight of her there, regarding his bungled belongings with such a proprietary air. "I told you that I'm no packer."

"So I see," she said, smiling.

She set busily to work gathering up the tossed shirts and folding the coats. Over an armful of garments she threw him a question:

"We don't want to pack the things you're going to wear back. Have you a traveling suit laid aside?"

"Oh, yes—that is, I don't know."

She shook her head disapprovingly, and he smiled sheepishly back at her. She was still holding the bundle of clothes to her breast. They made a clumsy bundle in her slender arms, and he stepped forward to take them from her, when she spoke again.

"I'm sorry you're leaving us, Mr. Brown."

"Oh, don't!" His cry was involuntary. "Don't call me that, Dorcas! Don't you remember last night? You called me—Richard!"

"That's right, girl! Last night you called him Richard, which I expect is his front name, all right; but the rest of it ain't Brown!"

It was Peter's characteristic drawl, and the unexpected sound of it brought them whirling about in startled surprise.

The old man's tall, angular figure filled the doorway. His little buried blue eyes caught the thin stream of light from the lamp, and their malicious gleam matched

the blue sheen of the revolver barrel dangling from his fingers. His left hand was spread, shoulder high, against the door jamb. Save that he was rocking slightly, as if in rhythm with the rocking winds outside, all the abandoned calm of the raging elements seemed to have gathered itself into that quiet figure.

From the center of the cluttered room the other man and the girl regarded him, half dazed by his abrupt appearance, their eyes wavering confusedly between the curiously intent face and the casually held revolver.

The girl was the first to shake off the spell he had lain upon them, and to seek refuge in commonplace words.

"Now, daddy, what are you doing, trotting that evil-looking old gun around the house and—and saying such funny things?"

Peter did not move, but a slow, malignant grin stretched his mouth, and he raised the Colt gradually until its muzzle covered Richard's heart.

"Saying funny things, am I?" he repeated sibilantly. "Ask *him* if it's funny! Ask *him*!"

The girl turned her puzzled gaze to Richard, and found that his eyes had gone lifeless and his face paper white. He essayed a feeble smile.

"No," he said, "it isn't funny. Once I found some humor in the situation, but now—no, it isn't funny."

"Ye see!" gloated Peter. "Ye see, *he* don't think it's funny!"

The gaze of the two men held across the girl—a gaze fraught with some galvanic force beyond her comprehension. She took a step toward her father.

"Why, daddy—"

"Stay off, girl, stay off!" he commanded, without taking his eyes from Richard's face. "I think *Mr. Brown* an' me sort of understand each other!"

"Daddy dear, what is it?" Anxiety for him had swept away all other emotions. She whirled on Richard. "Something has happened! Can't you see? Father's not well, he—"

"She thinks I've gone crazy, don't she now, *Mr. Brown*?" broke in Peter suavely. "But we know different, don't we? Ye know I ain't mad, don't ye—not mad the way she thinks?"

"Yes," said Richard dully, for the ingenuous simplicity of the girl was not his. He knew now that guilt had lain heavily

upon him—guilt born of that bleak moment on the rocks the night before—the guilt of one who has sinned in desire, if not in deed. Somehow the tale of their artless escapade had reached the old man, and he believed—what he believed was only too evident from the savage glare of his little eyes and the poised pistol in his hand. "Yes, I know that you're not mad, Mr. Stayton, but you are mistaken in—"

"Mistaken!" boomed Peter, his self-restraint slipping. "Mistaken, ye say! That shows well enough that ye know why I've come up here an' brought this along!" He patted the barrel of the weapon significantly. "Oh, you're a slick one, all right! Goin' away, warn't ye? Thought to get off with a whole skin to ye, eh? Didn't care what become of the girl ye'd ruined?"

"Father! Father!"

The girl sprang forward, but he whirled on her with a savage growl.

"Shut up, you! I'm doin' the talkin' now!"

"But, daddy, you don't un—"

"Ye goin' to tell me that ye warn't out all night with him? That ye didn't come sneakin' into the sluice this mornin' at three o'clock? That ye didn't get back home till nigh on to dawn? Is that what you're goin' to try and tell me?"

"No, no—we did! I mean the tide was low, and we couldn't—"

"High when ye went out, warn't it? Ye could 'a' put in right up to midnight, if ye'd seen fit, but did ye? Did ye?"

His voice had risen until now its volume throbbed and reverberated in the little room, and became an integral part of the tumult all about them. Richard spoke for the girl, his voice sharply edged.

"Mr. Stayton, you must listen to me," he said. "There is nothing to reproach your daughter for. I can easily explain—"

"Listen to ye!" broke in the old man.

"What stock do ye think I'd put in anything ye'd say? And who's reproaching the girl? Oh, you're a smooth liar, *Mr. Brown*, I'll grant ye that! All of ye is jest one lie, from your name clean through ye!" He loomed threateningly over them, but the hand that held the pistol was steady. "I took ye into my house on faith, like I'd 'a' picked ye up at sea an' give ye safe, free passage into harbor; an' what did ye do? Ye robbed me—ye took somethin' ye can't never give back!"

"No, father, he—"

"Shut up, girl! I'm at the wheel now!" She shrank away from him, from the terrible passion that was burning him—the passion that only calm men can know. "Do ye think she can ever hold her head up amongst decent folks any more? Do ye think I can? Did ye think ye could come up here an' dirty the name of Stayton, an' get off scot-free? You're the one that's mad, if ye think that!"

"I don't, but—"

"Shut up, or I'll blow ye clean through to the hell that's waitin' fer ye! Nobody'd blame me fer that. Folks 'd only thank me fer it!"

Richard made another attempt to speak, but the muzzle of the Colt was prodding into his ribs. The girl had sunk into the little Queen Anne chair, marble pale to her lips, the knuckles of her hands showing white against the chair arms.

"I'd sooner kill ye than not, but ye're more useful to me alive than dead right now."

"Mr. Stayton, you must listen—"

"Listen, is it? Listen!" he bellowed. "Ain't I been listenin' all day to folks draggin' my girl's name through the mud? Won't I be listenin' to the same thing all the rest of my days—hearin' folks call my girl a wanton?"

"By God, you shall hear—"

But Richard's hoarse cry was cut short by the old man's savage roar.

"Say another word, an' I'll shoot ye where ye stand—hear? Think I want to listen to any more of your lies? Warn't ye smooth and sweet, an' then the minute my back was turned didn't ye—didn't ye rob me?"

It was as if Peter had begun to fear his own terrible passion. He backed slowly away toward the door, his eyes and pistol still focused on Richard, his chest heaving.

"God fergive the murder in my heart—but I ain't goin' to kill ye. That would let ye off too easy. I'm goin' to make ye a present, instead. I'm goin' to give ye the girl ye wronged!"

# X

THE old tower quivered under the tremendous impact of the storm, and around the balcony a myriad unleashed fiends scurried, whimpering and clamoring at the closed blinds. Now that the boom of Peter's voice had ceased, these voices of the tempest rushed into the silence.

At the old man's last words, the drawn dismay on Richard's face had given place to a dazed disbelief. For a moment he stood staring woodenly before him. The girl's eyes were fixed in wide horror upon her father. Then Richard leaped forward.

"My God, man, you can't do that! You—"

"No? Can't I?" Peter's former rage was a puerile thing compared to the maniacal frenzy with which he met the other man's horrified cry. "No? Can't I? It's as good as done. Don't forget I told ye I'd jest as soon shoot ye as not; so stand back, young feller, and keep your mouth shut! Do ye think I been idle all day a mournin' my loss? Not I! The parson's downstairs this minute, likely, a brushin' up his service. Didn't I know that would be the last thing ye'd want? A slick, rich city feller like you to marry my girl! Never give it a thought, did ye? But I did! I know the kind ye are. The city's full of 'em. I must 'a' been blind not to see it right off, but I trusted ye. The devil ain't marked ye on the outside, yet, but I found ye out in time. Ye've ruined my girl's name—now ye'll give her another. Even if it ain't much, it 'll sound better 'n the one you stole—in other people's ears, anyhow."

"For God's sake, Mr. Stayton—"

But Peter lunged at him.

"One more word an' I'll put a hole through your carcass! I'll kill the girl, too. A Stayton—ye may not believe it, but a Stayton would prefer death to disgrace any time. Oh, I know what ye'd say, an' I know the girl would take your part. That's a woman's way—that's the Stayton way. Ye've both had plenty of time to talk—now I'll do the talkin'. The parson's waitin', see?"

The pistol was making a slow arc between them.

"There's goin' to be a weddin' all fair and proper—leastwise, that's what the parson thinks. I lied to him, but I expect the Lord 'll fergive me that lie, seein' it was in a good cause!"

"Father! Father!"

The girl had half risen, her voice strengthened by desperation, but Peter broke off her cry.

"Unless ye want to meet your Maker with a stain on your soul, girl, ye'll keep quiet! Ye'll both keep quiet now"—he chuckled triumphantly—"quiet as little



lambs, an' take your medicine. If ye don't, if either of ye speak one word that's like to make the parson think it ain't all regular and proper, I'll kill ye both, so help me God!"

Once more silence held them—a crowded, clamorous silence, as if the forces of nature had been coerced into providing a fitting background for the rudimentary drama being staged in the quivering tower atop the old white house.

"And now," suggested the old man with grim humor, "s'pose ye jest hand out them papers an' things ye said ye had along! I got a prejudice to the name of Brown, somehow. My girl 'll be satisfied with the name ye was christened by."

The girl sprang quickly to her feet, her gaze clinging to the blue barrel of the Colt as it followed her across the room to Richard's side.

"That's right! Get beside him!" sneered Peter.

His words released her from the spell in which the weapon had held her. She raised her eyes to Richard's face, and slowly he brought his haggard gaze to meet hers. It was a valiant little face she lifted to him, drained of its color, its buoyant vivacity, its endearing sparkle, but calm in the security of her own innocence.

"Your name isn't Brown, Richard?"

All her concern seemed to have centered itself in this disclosure.

"No," he said gently.

"What is it?"

"No need to ask him!" cried Peter. "You'll find it there among those books and papers."

But the girl's eyes clung questioningly to Richard's, and seemed to be drawing the anguish of his wretched soul down, down into their cool, gray depths. He heard himself saying evenly:

"My name is Richard Sells, Dorcas."

She shrank against him when Peter's free hand reached past them to the table, on which were strewn some loose papers, with a check book among them. The old man's fingers fumbled swiftly in the heap. Then, with a triumphant grunt, he backed again to the door and raised his voice, his eyes and the pistol still on that silent pair.

Richard was aware that Peter had called the clergyman, but this seemed, for the moment, of less importance than the fact that the girl had believed him before her father had verified his name. He found a curious

triumph in this—found, too, that his incoherent thoughts had met and grappled with the grotesque situation with a sort of detached and forensic logic.

He saw that he was helpless to prevent the marriage. He knew that if he blurted out the truth now, as he had been trying to do, the old man in his wrath was likely to shoot them both, and to go to his grave with a sense of duty well performed. Of their harmless excursion the night before, he evidently believed the worst. If the man whom Peter thought guilty of betraying his daughter were to confess that he was not free, the disclosure would only color the supposed offense more darkly. It would probably snuff out the last ember of the man's waning reason.

Thus Richard's thoughts, scurrying around and around like frantic mice in a revolving cage. His mind settled wearily into a lethargic huddle, only dimly aware of the curious activity going on about him.

"Remember!" hissed Peter from the doorway.

He stood aside then, and Richard was conscious of the stocky figure of the little minister, and, close at the latter's heels, the withered and gangling Rose Ruby. It was as if he were an attentive spectator at some preposterous play, toward which he had resolved to be politely uncritical. He was aware of voices. The clergyman's was warm and deep—an incongruously big voice for such a small man, Richard decided dispassionately.

"An' this is the groom, parson," Peter was saying with an elaborate assumption of heartiness. "Mr. Richard Sells, of New York—Parson Beckwith."

Richard felt his hand taken into a small, plump grasp, knew—surprisingly—that he was making a fitting rejoinder to the introduction, even while a vagrant sense of humor took cognizance of Rose Ruby's festive frock. It was green, with the snug bodice and puffed sleeves of the late nineties. Its revealing outlines made her look like some overgrown insect—a gigantic grasshopper, that was it!

A pressure upon his arm shook him oddly. The girl was looking up into his face, and an elusive word was floating just outside his consciousness. Ring! Some one had mentioned a ring. They were demanding a ring of him, but Peter already had it. It lay on the old man's outspread palm—a wide gold band.

"It was her mother's," he announced quietly. "She took it off the night she died—first time it had been off since we got married. She said, almost with her last breath, that she wanted Dorcas, here, to have it when *she* got married. Here it is!"

There was further talk. Richard realized dully that the clergyman was delivering a homily. He was very earnest and solemn, almost as if he were talking over a corpse. Richard caught the words "faith" and "purity" and "sin," but the speaker's voice seemed to weave itself into the cacophony raging outside the windows.

Rose Ruby had moved up beside Peter now, and they stood just behind the clergyman, who was spreading a little book in his hands—a small black prayer book. The thin ray of light from the lamp picked out the angular bridge of Rose Ruby's nose, and seemed to lend it a separate vivacity. It seemed to Richard to be gloating there, all by itself.

A trickle of water had skulked in beneath the window frame, and had started to crawl down the wall and across the matting. Then, as if the rich portent of the words had the power to still even the orgiastic rites outside, a lull fell over the tower room, and the minister's voice rose clear and full.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company—"

It was the marriage ceremony. These were the words that made Richard, in addition to everything else, a bigamist!

"Show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

Why didn't some one speak? *He* would speak—but then, of course, he dared not. All those myriad fiends outside, who had suspended their wild antics long enough to hear the service launched, raised their voices in shrill protest—bigamist, bigamist! But the clergyman's words droned on above them, calm and imperturbable. His voice was lifted in a question now, and Richard was aware that the old man had slipped his hand suggestively into his pocket. He heard his own voice saying:

"I will!"

He knew a swift sense of relief when the minister shifted his earnest scrutiny to the girl. After all, he told himself, there was

less harm in an empty ceremony than in murder. He had not hurt the girl. Tomorrow the old man would be sane, and would listen to their tale calmly. After that, Richard would be gone from Standish. All this was but a melodramatic bit of play acting staged by an infuriated old bigot. It was utterly unreal.

But the hand that was placed in his was real! A cold, moist little hand it was, but there was a steadiness in it that was magically reassuring.

He brought his dazed eyes to focus on the girl's face, and the sight of it swept his brain clear of its befuddling fever. This was his gift to her. How willingly he would have submitted himself to Peter's alternative, how gladly have welcomed the precious oblivion of death! But the girl's life should not be forfeit.

He echoed the minister's words evenly, secure in the rightness of his purpose, gathering strength from the thought that his crime was for her sake—for the woman he loved.

Her voice was raised now, making the immemorial vow—"for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and obey."

How brave she was! With what palpitant life she endowed the words! She knew nothing of love, nothing of life, but her inherent valor would one day meet both as superbly as she was meeting this crisis. As her clear voice rose and fell in the little room, it occurred to Richard that she could have spoken the phrases no more devoutly had they been uttered in all sincerity; yet she was only playing the preposterous rôle her father had thrust upon her.

His thoughts were invaded by the memory of Della parroting that same solemn promise in the vast, blossom-decked church, fidgeting restlessly in her tulle and satin.

"I thought I should *die* if I couldn't laugh!" was her comment afterward.

And now Richard was slipping another ring on another woman's hand—a wide, bulky affair, this one was, and too large for the competent little fingers that he held. He was murmuring automatically:

"With this ring I thee wed, with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

Mockery! He shivered; but better mockery than undeserved oblivion for the gallant little creature at his side. The clergyman's prayer wavered above them as they knelt, but Richard shut out the words.

He heard, instead, the rioting of rain and wind against the windows, and watched the thin stream of water crawling wetly across the matting toward the trailing absurdity of Rose Ruby's frock. His knees were stiff when he rose, and he thought dully that the prayer had been a long one.

"Well, well, Dorcas, my dear!" the minister was saying genially. "I'm not too old to claim a parson's privilege and kiss the bride, am I?"

Dorcas gave him her cheek, and now the taut constraint that had held them was shattered by leaden jovialities, by a forced levity, monstrous and hollow. Richard marveled at the girl's magnificent reserve as the minister filled in the marriage certificate to the accompaniment of his incessant pleasantries.

Rose Ruby, intimidated by the presence of the minister and the solemnity of the occasion, contented herself with grinning yellowly upon them. Peter was working as diligently to disperse the wedding party as he had labored to assemble it, urged on by the dangerous pallor of the girl and by Richard's chill taciturnity.

"All right, Rose Ruby—your name's on here as witness. Run along now. Mebbe the parson 'll drop ye at your house on his way uptown—eh, parson?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," concurred the clergyman. He turned with a fine simulation of heartiness to the pair standing rigidly where he had left them. "Well, young people, you'll have a wedding night to look back on! This isn't a storm one forgets in a hurry. You're leaving for the city to-morrow, your dad tells me, Dorcas."

"Richard has to get back," the girl said quietly.

"Just so, just so." He was gathering up his prayer book and slipping the certificate into its envelope, all with ostentatious energy. "A man has to keep his nose pretty close to the grindstone these days, if he's to keep a wife, eh?"

His chuckle spared Richard a reply. Once more his hand was taken into the minister's plump clasp.

"Ye'll find your way out if I don't come down with ye—eh, parson?" interrupted Peter loudly. "Sorry there ain't no wedding feast with this weddin', but there warn't no time fer frills an' furbelows, with these young people in such a hurry."

Rose Ruby had sidled surreptitiously

over to Dorcas, her face thrust forward eagerly; and now her hoarse whisper filled the room.

"Well, since he *has* married ye," she advised sibilantly, "make him take ye to Coney Island on your weddin' trip. It's a grand—"

But Peter's voice boomed forth, clipping short the eloquent description that might have followed.

"Come along, Rose Ruby! The parson's leavin'!"

She skulked swiftly to the door, her eyes avoiding the murderous malignity of Peter's regard, her head still wagging knowingly at the girl.

The clergyman bustled out, to the tune of his own studiously preserved cheerfulness. They heard his voice raised in lively conversation with the cackling old woman as they descended the stairs.

Peter stood motionless at the door until the sounds grew faint. Then he closed it softly, and turned a savage, triumphant face to his daughter.

## XI

DORCAS was standing rigidly beside the old chest of drawers, the fingers of her left hand curled against the palm, her eyes fixed with breathless intensity upon the wedding band.

"Well, Dorcas!"

She raised her head slowly at the words. Richard shook himself out of his enveloping lethargy, and took a step forward, but she drew him back with a firm pressure on his arm. The old man smiled contemptuously at the swift pantomime.

"Or perhaps I should say Mrs. Sells," he said.

Still she did not speak, though for a moment color flamed in her face—flamed, and faded almost at once. The pressure on his arm still admonished Richard to silence.

"I pretended I had to stop up here long enough to give ye my blessin'!" hissed Peter. "Blessin'!"

He took a step toward them, eliminating Richard from his vision by the simple expedient of turning a hunched shoulder to him.

"What I stopped up here to say to ye was this, girl—he's set ye right with the world now. You're married to him in the eyes of God and man, but that don't mean he's fit to have ye. What he done to ye proved that!"

Once more Richard took a step forward and opened his lips to speak, but the bitter words were flooding from the old man's, twisted mouth.

"I'm a Christian man, and the Lord's word is law with me; but even the Lord wouldn't ask a woman to live with a man she despised, an' if ye don't despise him after what he done to ye, ye're no kin of mine! He's saved your good name—that's all we care about. Now show him the door! Fling him overboard like ye would bilge water, girl!"

The same elemental forces that were at work outside were shaking the old man's big frame and thickening his voice; but the girl did not wince. She gazed back at him, her chin lifted and thrust slightly forward. When he paused, she lifted her hands, with the palms outward, as if to warn him away from her. It was a gesture of ineffable contempt.

"You—you dare?" she breathed. "You who married us at the point of that evil gun—you dare to tell me to throw *him* out?"

The old man stepped back, as if her repulsion had been physically enforced. A surprise that was almost ludicrous swept over his face.

"Dare?" he thundered. "Dare, when ye know he wronged ye?"

"Yes, *dare!*" she echoed. "Wronged me? How dared you think it? How dared you judge us on the evidence of a half crazy old woman? What right had you to condemn me unheard?"

Richard, who had stepped forward as the girl advanced upon her father, and who stood now, unconsciously, in an attitude of protection at her side, was aware that he was witnessing the birth of Dorcas's maturity, the death of her merry, irresponsible girlhood. Maturity cloaked the slender figure; maturity was in the steady, inexorable voice. Now she would speak, and, when she spoke, he doubted if even the furious old man would disbelieve her.

As he waited for the words that would release them both from this mesh of suspicion, and would place the wedding ceremony in the limbo of life's grotesqueries, he had a poignant sense of bereavement; yet why should he feel bereft of something he had never possessed?

"I saw it with my own eyes!" the old man was saying doggedly, his fury fanned by this sudden insurrection. "I saw the

skiff up to the sluice! Ye don't deny ye came in on the tide? Ye don't deny ye were out till dawn, or nigh on to dawn, with him?"

"No, I don't deny it. I wouldn't have denied it if you had asked me, as any just father would have done; but you didn't ask me. You preferred to listen to the evil tongue of a wicked old woman. That was all you needed to sentence me—you who call yourself a Christian!"

"Ye *were* out all night!"

"And I might have been out all night again and again, and still never have been the thing you thought me! Had you no faith in your own daughter?"

"Yes!" he bellowed. "But I ain't got no faith in smooth city liars! I don't know him!"

"You knew *me!* Do you think I am so lacking in pride, so weak, that I would forfeit my self-respect as easily as that?" She stepped back, holding her arms out before her, as if to place a tangible barricade between them. "But you *did* think it! You judged me without a hearing. How many times you have picked up some poor creature adrift at sea, and fed and nursed him, and brought him safely into port—and then bragged about it! Oh, you would do that for a stranger, but when you believed your own daughter was in distress, all you could think of was your pride!"

"Ye sullied my name," he roared. "Ye've ruined me."

"You see, you were thinking of yourself—not of me. If you had thought of me, you would surely have given me a chance to explain."

"I was thinkin' of ye!"

"No, you were thinking only of yourself. Do you think my mother would have believed an evil thing like that of me? Do you?"

"Thank God she ain't here to see it!" cried Peter. He raised his fist and shook it above his head. "She'd 'a' died of shame fer ye! Ye were out all night with this—this—"

"We were!" she broke in. "We went out on the rocks, to watch the moon rise, and it was so—so beautiful"—her voice broke, but she kept on bravely—"it was so beautiful that we just stayed on and talked, and forgot that there were foul minds and cruel suspicions in the world. It seemed as if there were only peace and beauty and purity. Then we saw that the



tide had gone out, and our boat was beached. It took us a long time to get her off, and when we came back we had to row into the sluice." Her voice died away, and her shoulders lifted in a contemptuous shrug. "There is the horrible story. You might have had it before, if you had taken the trouble to ask for it. You knew that I wouldn't lie to you!"

The flickering light from the small lamp and the screaming of the wind outside lent vitality to the silence that followed. The old man's fingers were clawing at his mustache, and his eyes were fixed on the girl's white face with a venom that had gathered greater virulence as her story progressed. It was almost as if they had forgotten Richard's presence. Now, seeing that there was no credence in the old man's face, he stepped forward; but even as he spoke, he was conscious that his words sounded puny, ineffectual.

"I could have explained it, Mr. Stayton," he said, as Peter shifted his malevolent gaze to meet the other man's eyes. "If you had called *me* to account, I could have told you how the thing occurred. It was entirely my fault that we stayed so late. I'm not very well versed in the matter of tides and so on."

"She was!"

"But I kept her. I wouldn't have done so if I had thought there was any harm in it."

"There was no harm in it!" defended the girl swiftly. "What harm could there be? I was with Richard! There was nothing in it but happiness and peace; but you have robbed us of those. You've made it seem slimy and horrible with your ugly, suspicious thoughts!"

"And who wouldn't be suspicious?" thundered the old man. "The whole town's talkin'! This house has stood here nigh on to two hundred years, an' there ain't nobody dared raise a voice ag'in' it until now!"

"Pride!" accused the girl scathingly. "You would sacrifice your own daughter to your pride!"

"Who says I sacrificed ye?" he demanded. "I saved ye! I married ye to the skunk that ruined ye — *he'd* never have done it! But I ain't forgot ye're my daughter still. Now that he's made ye an honorable woman, so that ye can hold up ye're head agin, kick him out! Heave him overboard, like I told ye to!"

Richard opened his lips resolutely, stung to speech, intent on making the announcement that would show the enraged old man what a ghastly farce he had engaged in; but the girl's firm clasp on his arm robbed him of initiative. Her voice rang out again clearly.

"You say that — you, when you have just made me this man's wife? Only an hour ago you thought marriage sacred enough to purify a terrible sin. You brought me up to think of marriage as eternal." Her voice was athrob, her eyes flashing. "You heard me make my vows. You heard me promise to live with this man until death do us part."

"I didn't say ye had to live with—"

"Dorcas, I must—"

The abortive sentences of the two men were simultaneous, but her voice crested them.

"And do you think I break my vows so easily? Do you think I should have let you marry me to Richard, if I had not intended to be truly his wife? I would have died first!"

Her head was flung up regally. Without taking her eyes from her father's rabid gaze, she stepped, a living bulwark, between Richard and the infuriated Peter.

"Did you hear me promise to love, honor and obey him? And after *that* do you think I would send him away — my husband?"

She had stepped closer to Richard. He could feel her quivering against him. He knew that her eyes had left her father's face and were raised for a fleeting instant to him.

"Where my husband goes, I go. I am his wife, and whom God has joined together let no man put asunder!"

## XII

THE words hung resonantly in the little room, and were taken up by the polyphony outside, of which they became the theme, until the whole was woven into a mighty fugue. The girl's exalted face held the gaze of the two men, and the confession on Richard's lips withered into a jumble of futile words.

The old man, startled for an instant out of his choleric fury, started back, and for the first time a chilly trickle of doubt cut its way through his assurance. The girl's radiance clothed her like an immaculate vestment. Could a wanton look like that?

But even as his misgivings invaded his fevered brain, his fury redoubled to meet them.

"So that's the way ye feel about it, is it?" he sneered. "Well, mebbe ye think ye can pull the wool over my eyes, but it's too late. Ye got some pride left in ye, anyway!"

"Yes," she countered calmly. "Yes, I have enough pride to resent any more of your blasphemy. Leave us, please!"

"Oh, I'm goin'!" He was moving backward toward the door. "Don't think I want to stay, do ye? But mebbe ye'll see things different in the mornin'! Mebbe ye'll repent of your bargain; an' if ye do, I'll not hold this ag'in' ye! I've done my best!"

"You have!" she broke in. "You've done your best to bring us to your own level, to torture and shame and humiliate us; but if you were wiser, you'd see how you have failed!"

"Failed, have I?" he sneered. "I made him marry ye, didn't I?"

"Yes!" she said. "Yes—and I shall live all my life with that in mind. I shall live only to atone for that—to try and make up to my husband for that injustice."

"We-ell," he drawled derisively, "it's as good a way to get around the shoals as any; an' it looks to me like ye've got a job. He don't seem unwillin' fer ye to take the tiller!"

Once more Richard came forward, but the girl pressed him back.

"Don't speak, Richard—don't speak!"

"No fear of him speakin' now! He's got his dose! If ye take my advice, ye'll heave him overboard an' give the sharks a bellyful!"

"You dare!" she cried. "You dare! Go! Do you hear me?—go!"

Involuntarily the old man shrank back under the violence of the command. He felt awkwardly for the knob, and flung the door wide. His face was a quivering, distorted mask of fury, but there was a ghastly suspicion in his hot eyes that belied the sneer on his lips.

"Oh, I'll go, an' leave ye to wallow in your sin! Since ye made your wicked bed, lie on it!"

He pounded down the stairs and through the dim halls. The kitchen door stood open, pouring a feeble stream of light on the figured strip of carpet that led to the front door. He stepped into the kitchen, slam-

ming the door behind him. Then for a wild, befuddled moment he stood staring across the room.

Bunched in a low rocker near the stove, the folds of her musty green gown pouring over the floor and imbuing her face and gleaming eyes with a sickly hue, sat Rose Ruby. The bridge of her crooked nose was twitching, like that of a senile rabbit, above her yellow grin.

With a whispered curse, Peter strode across to her. Her smile widened as he approached.

"I thought ye went home with the parson!" he said.

"Well, I didn't. I thought mebbe ye might want me to stay an' cook breakfast fer ye in the mornin'." She cackled suggestively. "Like as not ye won't get none if ye wait fer the bride to cook it fer you, eh?"

He swooped down upon her, dragged her to her feet, and thrust his face close to hers.

"Do ye know I could kill ye?" he hissed.

"Do ye know I *will* kill ye, if ye don't tell me the truth? Ye *did* see em, didn't ye? Ye did see 'em come in together, nigh on to dawn, didn't ye?"

Her cracked yellow grin did not alter, and she wagged her ragged head with a vehemence that threatened to sever it from her scrawny neck.

"Nigh on to dawn it was, so help me God!" she whispered triumphantly. "Didn't I tell ye so?"

"Yes, ye told me, but be ye certain?"

"I saw 'em, I tell ye! I saw 'em with my very own eyes! Arm and arm they come in!"

He released her, conviction flooding back reassuringly. Muttering unintelligibly, he stalked the length of the kitchen, and then came to a pause before the inflated old woman.

"Go to bed! Ye can stop here to-night. Ye're right—I'll be needin' ye to-morrow. Get to bed!" he commanded.

He watched her as, with a final triumphant grin, she sidled out of the room.

Once alone, he abandoned himself utterly to the madness that was creeping upon him. Like some vicious caged monster he paced the room, back and forth, back and forth. He had been right—they *had* been out all night. Well, he had married them; and now she was up there—his girl and her seducer.

He stifled a frenzied oath at the thought. His girl—his baby—and she had turned against him when he had only been trying to save her! Now she was up there with the man who had wronged her. She had put her own father away from her and given herself to a stranger. They were up there together!

Half crazed, he flung the outer door open. He started back from the terrific onslaught of wind and rain that assailed him, and then strode out across the flooded path and across the lawn, which sucked at his feet and oozed great rushes of slush into his shoes.

The wind beat fiercely against him. Rain poured over his bared head and ran in rivulets down his face. The gaunt limbs of the old horse-chestnut tree were moaning and swaying like some stark skeleton borne aloft by the wind, and the roar of the waves against the shore was deafening; but he was unconscious of the tumult, unconscious of the downpour that flooded his face and stung his eyes as he raised them to the lookout tower, from whose closed blinds feeble pencils of light were seeping. They were up there together—his girl and the stranger who had robbed him!

As Peter looked, he raised both arms, with his fists knotted into gnarled stubs, and his hoarse voice lifted in a terrible apostrophe:

"Damn ye! Damn ye! May your soul go to the hell that's a waitin' fer it!"

When the door closed on the old man, Richard stood gazing blindly at it, while the massed misery of a decade crowded in upon him. A benumbing paralysis, born of his own futility, was upon him as he turned to the girl—to the tribunal of those clear, confident eyes.

She faced him with her head high, and with color flaming in her cheeks. Humbly he took her two outstretched hands. They stood thus for a moment, looking into each other's eyes, while the world fell away from them, leaving them on the altar stairs of some shining Arcadia. Her voice reached him, soft, ineffably tender:

"Richard! You see it's all right! In spite of everything, it is all right!"

She said it with exultant assurance. It was all right, in spite of everything!

Mechanically his brain recorded the words, "in spite of everything;" but she had yet to learn about Della.

"Didn't you feel it, too, Richard, when the minister began to speak? Before that it was horrible; and then suddenly—it was when you took my hand—I knew that it was all right, for I looked up at you and I saw!"

"You saw?" he echoed dully.

"That you—that you loved me," she faltered. "I could read it in your eyes; and when I saw it there, I knew that I loved you!"

She loved him! The phrase so softly spoken filled the little room with pulsant life. The rioting elements outside took it up and blazoned it forth on the trumpet tongues of the wind. It sang itself into his consciousness, rousing him from his stupor, drowning out the foreboding voices already there, setting itself to the rhythm of his leaping pulses. She loved him!

He felt her swaying against him, and knew that he had taken her into his arms, that he was holding her close, that her head was on his breast and his lips against her hair. She loved him—she had said it; and he found himself echoing her.

"Dorcas, Dorcas, I love you, I love you!"

"I knew, Richard, I knew!"

Ecstasy flooded back, washing prudence and reason before it.

"When did you know?" he demanded.

"I thought I knew only to-night," she said awesomely, "but now it seems as if I had known always—always!"

"That is because I have loved you always, Dorcas. Ever since there has been love in the world I have been loving you!"

"Yes, Richard, I think real love seems like that."

"And you love me?"

"I do—I love you. That is why I said that, in spite of all this horror, it is all right. We were meant to belong to each other—and what does it matter how it came about?"

"We were meant to belong to each other!" The words roused him from the ecstatic trance into which he had slipped. His arms fell away from her in an agony of self-condemnation. What had he done? What had he said? He had told her that he loved her when he had intended to tell her about Della. Why?

Ah, he remembered now—she had said she loved him! How could he cap that divine statement with his own sordid story? Yet he must tell her. Her love for him

made it all the more imperative. She believed herself to be his wife!

He forced his stricken gaze to her, and found her eyes full of anxiety. Would the words never come?

"Dorcas, Dorcas, what have I done—when I would rather have died than make you unhappy?"

She caught his hands and cuddled them against her breast.

"But we're going to be happy together, Richard!"

"You don't know—"

"I know that we love each other. I know that love can survive even this."

"But I have subjected you to all this—to a barbarous marriage that never should have been—"

"No, no!" she protested. "It was I—my father; but, even so, perhaps it was meant to be this way. We might never have found each other. After all"—she raised a troubled smile to him—"you were going away from me, Richard!"

"Yes, yes—I was going away."

"Did you know that you loved me?"

"Yes, Dorcas, I knew."

"And you were leaving—in spite of that?"

"Because of it!"

"You were leaving me because you loved me! Why, dear?"

An agonized moan escaped him.

"Because I'm not worthy of you! I'm not fit to touch your blessed little shoe!"

"Don't you think I should be the judge of that?"

He drew a hand across his forehead, and it came away moist.

"How can you judge me, or anything about me, when you don't know me? Oh, my God, can't you see?"

Her wide eyes were upon him, and, as he spoke, the bewildered distress in their depths gave way to a slow terror. With a moan, he sank into the little Queen Anne chair and dropped his face in his cupped hands. The windows were shaking in demoniacal frenzy, and the draft from them whipped the pale flame of the lamp into gusty rebellion.

The girl stood where he had left her, her horrified gaze on that bent head. Her hands went slowly to her throat. He had been going away—yet he loved her!

Her eyes went to the trunk, roamed aimlessly about the cluttered room, and came at last to his desk, with its jumble of books

and papers, and, propped against the inkstand, the white envelope with the scrawl across its face.

It held her gaze and lured her across to it. It seemed as if she knew that it bore her name even before she groped for it with fingers that had gone suddenly dead. She fumbled desperately with the sealed flap before it would yield the closely written pages.

Once, as she stood there reading what he had written, Richard raised his head and stared haggardly across at her; but, save for the unearthly pallor of her skin, the girl gave no sign of the havoc those tragic words were making of her valorous composure.

He was dragged back from the abysmal despair into which he had sunk by her touch upon his hair. He jerked his head up wildly. Only her eyes were alive in the still marble of her face, but they were living wells of commingled horror and compassion. He sprang to his feet and away from her, plunging against the trunk.

"You see! You see! Oh, my God, Dorcas, don't hate me!"

"Hate you?" she whispered incredulously. "Hate you, dear? It is you who should hate my father. Oh, Richard, my dear!"

Her tone astounded him. Perhaps she had not understood.

"Don't you see what I have done—what this thing has done to you? I am a bigamist—do you realize that? Do you realize what people will say of you *now*? And I have done it to you—I!"

Self-restraint had left him. Bleak, pinched, tragic, he stared down at her, shaken out of his virile strength into a cringing suppliant.

With a little cry of protest, she went to him, all the newly awakened forces of her womanhood rising to meet the sudden demand upon them. She took his hands. At her touch he crumbled utterly, and dropped to his knees before her.

"Ah, Dorcas, my darling, my darling, forgive me! I never meant to hurt you, God knows!"

"Of course not!"

She had his head in her arms, had drawn it against her, and he could feel her fingers against his temples and the warm throb of her body against his cheek.

"And now you know—you know!"

"Yes," she said, "I know. I might have



known before, but somehow I never thought of—just that.”

“It seemed to me, when I found you, that I had been groping blindly for you all my life—and even before that, back somewhere in some other world. It was as if I had found something that I had lost so long ago that I had forgotten I had lost it.” The words tumbled forth incoherently. “And now it’s as if I had been unfaithful to you, Dorcas—unfaithful—”

“No, no,” she soothed. “How could you know?”

“I should have known that you were somewhere in the world waiting for me. I should have looked for you before!” He stopped suddenly, and gazed up at her in a transport of agony. “Oh, Dorcas, if you could say you didn’t love me, if I could go away feeling that I hadn’t hurt you, my darling!”

“You haven’t hurt me,” she said softly, and added, with a strange, wondering ardor: “I do love you, Richard—I do love you, dear!”

“Thank God! No, I don’t mean that!”

He fell back against her once more, and her arms went about his shoulders with a yearning tenderness.

“After all, dear,” she said, after a long moment, “your telling me this, and my knowing it, doesn’t alter the fact that we love each other.”

“Ah, my darling, I would be better dead!”

“No!” she protested, and her voice had taken on a challenging ring. “No, I don’t believe that. I don’t believe things like this happen because we will them. Father thinks he brought this about, but I don’t believe that, either. I believe there is something behind this that none of us can see—the same power that put love into my heart. Perhaps it is that you need me—that you need me even more than if we could belong to each other.”

A sharp crash cut into the solemn words as one of the small window panes broke loose from its frame and came crashing to the floor. The wind rushed through the blinds, loosing a small tornado among the papers on the desk.

Richard leaped to his feet, but the girl was at the window before him. She stood with her back against the shattered pane, stopping the rush of wind and rain with her slender body, like a living fortification between him and the frustrated fury of the

elements. For a moment she remained there before she moved away and began stuffing his raincoat into the ragged hole.

When she turned to him again, her face was radiant with a sort of divine elation. It was as if they had both sensed the symbolism in that impulsive maternal gesture. His knees were shaking. She laid a firm hand on his arm, and drew him gently toward the couch.

“Come, dear!”

He made a feeble protest, knowing as he made it how puerile and ineffectual he had become beneath the soothing magic of her compassion and understanding. With gently urgent eyes and hands she softly forced his head down upon the pillow. He captured her hands and drew them against his face.

“Dorcas, Dorcas, what can I say?”

“Nothing—unless you tell me that you love me.”

“I love you, I love you! I am a monster, and you are a saint! I love you dearly, but what can I do? What are we going to do?”

“I don’t know yet, dear. Try not to think about the future.”

“I am a bigamist!”

“You are mine!” she cried. “I know I shouldn’t feel that way if it were wrong. We know in our hearts that in the sight of God we are man and wife. Even if we can never belong to each other on earth, my love is yours forever. You need it—you need me. We need each other. I am going to take care of you.”

She had dropped down beside him, her head close to his. Outside, the tumultuous wind had spent itself, and was dying into a low moan. The blissful quiescence that had succeeded Richard’s despair took possession of him again.

There was magic in the lax fingers he was holding against his face—a strange leg-erdmain that blotted out the past, obscured the future, and left him suspended somewhere between, in the impregnable fortress of the girl’s tenderness. His fingers tightened around hers, and the girl, meeting the almost frantic appeal in his eyes, gave him her calm, serene smile.

Like some helpless victim of the storm, he had been tossed at her feet, buffeted and bruised and torn by life, and she had loved him. Surely there was some agency in this that was not mortal! Surely he had not been sent to her that she might fling him

back into the bleak depths from which he had come!

The thought lent her strength, lit a faint beacon of hope in her brooding eyes, and banished the dark shadow that lay just beyond the dawn and over the dark, inscrutable future. To-night she must cherish him, must forget everything save that he was prostrated, and that she must have courage for them both.

"We must try to have faith, Richard," she whispered.

He moved her hands to his lips and kissed them reverently.

"My wedding ring, dear!" she reminded him softly.

He laid his lips reverently on the wide gold band.

### XIII

ABOUT the time when New England was hauling forth her protective tarpaulins and fastening her blinds against the oncoming storm, some three thousand miles away, a low-slung blue roadster purred lazily along the road that falls away from Quimper to the sand dunes of the Breton coast. Past ancient plaster houses, chipped and scarred by the years, it rolled, drawing the curious glances of peasants at work in the fields, rousing sleeping dogs, who barked their protest against anything as modern as a motor invading their quiet seclusion.

The woman in the car turned, with a smile, to her companion.

"You'd think the natives had never seen a car before," she said.

"Or a beautiful woman," rejoined her companion promptly. "It's very likely that out here in this backwash they see the former a darned sight oftener than the latter; so let 'em get an eyeful, lovey!"

She twinkled up at him, snuggling down more comfortably in the low seat, and tapping his sleeve lightly with a slender gloved finger.

"You never miss an opportunity, do you, Hal, my dear?"

"Alas, yes!" he grinned. "I've missed you, these—how many years?"

She chuckled derisively.

"You *are* greedy! Here I am beside you! Here, metaphorically speaking, I have been this long time. What more would you have?"

He turned to her swiftly, easing the car into a slow crawl.

"You!" he said. "All of you, furtive

little devil that you are—furtive, elusive, always just out of reach!"

She looked down quizzically at the hand he had placed about her shoulders.

"Out of reach?"

"Yes, even like this!" He tightened his hold of her almost fiercely. "Don't stall, Della! You know damned well what I mean! You're here—"

"Very much so, it appears!"

"But where do you keep the real you—the essence? Wrapped up in a thousand inhibitions!"

She bristled at that.

"Inhibitions! I don't own one."

"Well, then, where are your emotions?"

"In cold storage, Hal, old thing!"

"Another name for caution," he scoffed.

"Exactly," she agreed; "but not the kind of caution you probably think. I'm afraid you credit me with sentiments I don't possess."

"I'm beginning to think you don't possess any, my dear!"

She lifted an impudently smiling face to meet his avid glare.

"Why think at all, Hal? It really isn't being done, you know."

"You're a little she-devil, Dell," he told her amiably. "If you are human—if you do possess emotions, you keep them tucked in beneath that admirable shell of yours, like a hard-shelled turtle."

"Well, turtles bite if you poke 'em," she warned. "You'd better watch where you're driving, or I shall be running around with all my little red brothers and sisters—though, if I'm a turtle, how can I be a little devil as well?"

"You're both!" he countered, and swerved the car back to the center of the road.

She snapped open a thin silver case and extracted a cigarette.

"Stop a minute and let me get a light, will you?"

Obediently he drew over to the side of the road and stopped the car near a cluster of poplar trees. He held a match to her cigarette and watched the lazy cloud of smoke issue from her red lips.

"I suppose it's your husband," he ruminated sourly, after a moment.

"You suppose what's my husband?"

"Whatever it is that keeps you—"

"Impregnable?" she supplied archly.

"H-m—yes."

"My dear Hal, how delightfully naïve!

I'm as much out of Dicky's reach as yours. You mustn't attribute my fidelity to such a worthy motive."

"Then, by God—"

"Now, Hal, don't get heroic! It's too wearing."

"You've kept me dangling for a long time, Della."

"Which is the answer—I dangle—you dangle. That, my dear, is the only successful way to philander. You owe me a debt of gratitude for preserving your youth."

He flung out his hands in mock despair. "Epigrams!"

"Subtleties," she corrected. "Don't you see, when you cease to dangle, you just naturally fall, and you get all messed up in emotions. That is the inevitable result of injudicious philandering—an emotional orgy, from which the parties of the first and second part emerge sated, battered, and bitter. That is what I would avoid. It's too aging, too unsatisfactory. Let us continue to dangle!"

His cynical absorption in her words had given place to a restless irritability. He sent a swift glance up and down the quiet road before he drew her roughly to him and found her smiling mouth with his lips. When he released her, his lips and eyes hot, he found her cool insolence unchanged.

"No use, Hal! If you refuse to dangle, you'll have to find another affinity."

"I'm damned if I will! You're not going to evade me this time! What do you think I trotted three thousand miles across the Atlantic for?"

She shrugged.

"I don't know—to see that sunset, perhaps."

She pointed ahead where the road traced a sinuous course between placid fields toward the distant sand dunes along the shore. Above it the sun hung blandly, pouring an iridescent flood of color on the undulating hills and tiny plaster houses.

"You see," she observed lazily, "how pleasant and inarduous a thing it is to look at a sunset; and yet all that beauty has been the cause of countless scientists' wrinkles, because they insisted upon prodding and prying to see what makes it beautiful. In other words, they weren't willing to dangle, so they got themselves all messed up in refractions and parallaxes and things."

"I don't give a damn for the sun! It's you that I—"

"But don't you see the analogy? You're not satisfied just to have me like this. You want to stir me up and dissect me, and I refuse to be either stirred up or dissected!"

"You can refuse all you like. You can't get away from me now!"

"What will you use—force?"

"No—tenderness."

"How bourgeois!"

"You've never been in love!"

"I told you I refuse to be stirred up."

He took her roughly by the shoulders, his heavy, handsome face crimson.

"It isn't going to do you a bit of good to refuse. Now that I know your scruples are mere vanity, I'm damned if I observe your danger signals any longer!"

"Then don't cry if you get hurt."

"Della, you're a fool," he said. "You're a fascinating, pig-headed little fool, and you're drying up like an undernourished spring!" An impatient frown drew itself between her languid eyes, but he hurried recklessly on. "Here we are, alone together, three thousand miles away from everybody, and what do you give me? Words! You think you're not inhibited, but you are. You're a vain little prig, and all these carefully smothered emotions of yours are going to turn and rend you some day, while love—"

"Who's talking about love?"

"I am! I love you, and you know it!"

"I know you entertain a mild, emotional sentiment for me."

"My God, you call it mild! I've been aching, burning for you this long time." She could feel his hot breath against her cheek. "Do you think I'm going to continue to dangle, as you call it, when I've got you here in my arms, when I know that underneath that metallic shell of yours you're warm—warm? Don't you know that just over the hill there lies ecstasy for us both?"

"And wrinkles," she supplemented, with a strained little grin.

"No!" he denied. "Even if there were, isn't it worth a few wrinkles?"

"No!"

"You're a coward—a prude!"

"I'm not, and you know it!"

"You are," he insisted savagely, luring her with his eyes and lips. "Come with me, Della! Come with me to the end of the world—to days and nights of ecstasy!"

"No, Hal."

"You will!" he said hoarsely. "You

can't resist it, Della. What are you made of, anyway?"

"Sugar and spice and everything nice," she chanted, but her breath was coming in short gasps.

"I believe it!" he gloated. "I don't believe there's a molecule of warm, red blood in your veins! If there is, you'll come with me!"

Her sardonic smile had fixed itself on her lips, but her eyes were blazing.

"Look!" he cried. "Look down there, where the road turns to the sea! There's an inn hanging over the dunes over there. From its windows you can see an eternity of blue water—blue in the morning, with the sun on it, and at night sprinkled with magic by the moon. Think of us there, little prude! Let me teach you what it means to love and be loved!"

"Ah, you're not playing fair with me!" she whispered. "You're poetizing!"

"I'm talking the language of love," he said ardently. "Look, the sun is pointing the way! Come, Della, where we shall be alone!"

"And then?" she breathed.

"And then," he echoed, irritated at being shot so far beyond his target, "then more life, more love! We shall have had our hour!"

There was no breeze, and the heat of the late August afternoon was sultry and close. The body of the little roadster seemed to have captured and held the warm rays of the sun, wrapping its occupants in an enervating cloak. Della's eyes were hot now, and the rouge on her cheeks faded against the flush beneath it. He bent over her, laid his lips swiftly on hers, withdrew them as swiftly, and threw out his clutch.

"Where are we going?" she demanded.

"Ah!" he gloated. "A pretty pronoun, my darling! I've just told you where we are going—there!" He pointed ahead. "To the end of the world—together, little prude!"

"You know that isn't true!"

"I must have proof, then!"

"You shall have it!"

He thrust out his chin and leaned forward, as if invoking the power of the little car to follow his own leaping spirits. Her lips still burning from his kiss, she leaned back inertly against the seat.

"But step on it, Hal!" she admonished softly. "My barriers are down, but you

must hurry before I change my mind and put them up again!"

"Right-o, darling! We're off!"

They shot ahead down the precariously winding road, past tranquil fields and sleeping cottages, past placid herds of sheep and families of astounded goats, who loped frantically for shelter from that meteoric apparition. The rushing air had a tang of salt in it, and the sinking sun was ahead of them.

"If I could just keep that glare out of my eyes, damn it!" he cursed.

Only a moment later, a Breton fisherman, dragging his nets up the beach after his day's haul, jerked abruptly upright, and, with a muttered invocation to his favorite saint, crossed himself, as a wild blue monster came hurtling over the steep dunes a few hundred feet above him—came crashing down close to the placidly lapping waves, where it settled into a tangled heap of blue and gleaming nickel half buried in the sand.

The fisherman's cry summoned others, who came running toward the ominously quiescent pile, crossing themselves as they ran, and babbling incoherently. They huddled together not too near the jumbled mass, their white lips moving in soundless apostrophes to their saints. One man among them, braver than the rest, stepped closer, to inspect the gruesome object. He came back quickly, his face gray, his cap dangling from limp fingers.

"Henri has gone for the doctor," announced some one.

The man who had looked closely at the quivering blue thing shook his head.

"Even the priest would be too late to help them. Some one had better go to the *maire*."

A few of them hurried off in search of help, while others grouped themselves against the sand dunes, to listen in morbid absorption to the fisherman who had witnessed the accident.

"It came over so—*mon Dieu*, as if it were falling out of the heavens themselves! I was hauling in my nets when I heard it—a great roar—"

As he talked, the sun, like a sleepy, bloodshot eye, disappeared beneath the lid of the horizon, and the rising tide crawled avidly up, to pull and suck at the inert mass lying on the sand.

(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)



# The Reclamation of Jack Birmingham

HOW A CLERGYMAN LIED AND A WOMAN TOLD THE TRUTH

By Lily A. Long

**J**ACK BIRMINGHAM, as a young fellow, was the leader of one of the wildest gangs of street hoodlums in San Francisco, in the bygone days of that golden city. His mother, who was a thin and pathetic widow living upon an almost invisible pension, repeatedly told him that he was breaking her heart. It is to be hoped, in charity, that he doubted the accuracy of her diagnosis, for he never modified his conduct in consequence.

"You wouldn't believe," she would say plaintively to any chance listener, "that the Birminghames were God-fearing people back East, and pillars of the church, and that Jack's grandfather Casler was a judge of the Supreme Court of the State—*more* than respectable. You wouldn't believe it—I know that!"

When you saw handsome, daredevil Jack Birmingham rollicking down the street, his arms about the shoulders of two other young ruffians, you might have found it difficult to accept that more than respectable ancestry if you did not also remember the handsome, daredevil Jack Birmingham of the intermediate generation, who had drummed his way through four years of the Civil War with a hard-drinking regiment of Kentucky volunteers, and whose habits, formed under the frightful pressure of that environment, had later had their part in reconciling his thin and pathetic widow to the exigencies of the tiny pension. Perhaps the reckless and now forgotten father might have been less perplexed than the granddaughter of Judge Casler was, in accounting for the regrettable tendency on the part of the present bearer of his name to prefer the lively society of the water front to clean-collar picnics.

On the water front Jack had a golden reputation. Not only could he drink longer than any one else without losing his equilibrium, but he could hit quicker and harder, he could swear more fearfully, and he could outwit the police more adroitly. His luck at cards was so phenomenal as to mark him the special ward of the blind goddess. In short, he was a hero in that melodramatic margin of a great city where honors go to the most vivid personality, even though it be the most lawless.

In only three particulars would his qualifications have met the requirements of the more conventional world. Beyond question he was handsome, beyond question he was courageous, and always he was a speaker of the bald truth—the balder the better.

For cowardice and lying he had the arrogant intolerance of the strong, who have never had occasion to study the life-saving virtue of evasiveness. When it is well known that a man has both the ability and the inclination to knock down any one who looks at him askance, what need has he of the protective art of lying?

Moreover, to an extent somewhat astonishing, Jack forced his own code upon the gang that rendered him feudal service. They might cozen the rest of the world to their hearts' content, for all he cared, but to him they had to give the incriminating truth or be cast into the outer darkness of his unforgiving contempt.

Then Jack Birmingham got married—and this is where the story really begins. He married a shy, blue-eyed little girl, with fluffy flaxen hair, whose name was Florence, but who was predestined to be known as Flossie. She regarded Jack with awe-struck adoration, and would no more have

ventured to challenge any opinion he might express than she would have questioned the Ten Commandments.

As for her own opinions, it never occurred to Jack that she had any. She was merely the sweetest, prettiest little girl he had ever seen, and he wanted to keep her all to himself. So he acquired the legal right to call her by his own name, and he put her into a little house on which he paid the rent, and he watched her pour his coffee, or brush out her fluffy hair, or speak severely to the milkman, with never failing delight.

She was better than a movie. She was also more expensive; and to meet the needs of the new situation Jack went into business. Not by the door of any mere clerkship! The dull routine of a store or an office would have been intolerable to his adventurous spirit. Besides, he knew a more profitable line.

He wheedled a friendly saloon keeper into advancing a sum which enabled him to buy the controlling share in a fishing smack. He had the pick of the men of the water front for his crew, and unsuspected stores of real knowledge in regard to the business of fishing in the background of his brain. It was exciting work, and close work, and hard work, but in two years' time his debt was paid, and business was running so profitably that Jack could afford to relax his attention.

All through those two years he had not once been drunk. This was not because of any effort at self-restraint. He simply had given the matter no thought. The hard, close work had in itself supplied all the excitement he needed, and he had been away from his old associates. But there was not an atom of "reform" in the changed situation, and one day, when a former companion jeered at him for a Y. M. C. A. convert, a mollicoddle under the thumb of his wife, Jack promptly challenged the fellow to a drinking contest, glass for glass, till one or the other should not be able to crook his elbow.

To his astonishment and his unspeakable disgust, he was worsted in the contest before it was fairly begun, and by a man whose prowess he had heretofore treated with friendly ridicule. His two years of abstinence and hard work had built into his body millions of new cells, which were taken by surprise by the alcoholic onset, and were utterly unprepared to withstand

the enemy. Jack was furious, and plunged into a spree such as he had never known before.

## II

UNFORTUNATELY, Jack's business was prospering so automatically, at this time, that he could afford to forget it. Unfortunately, too, Flossie, who for two years had been given to understand that her wishes were of the greatest importance to her husband, undertook to put that pleasant theory to a test. She began with reproaches, sank to tears, rose to pleading, and finally could only stand off watching in silent dismay as she saw the great engine of Jack's will running wild.

That deliberate plunge into dissipation had snapped some control which, in the wild years of his youth, had never failed to keep him from the lowest depths. Perhaps the taunt about his wife's thumb had aroused an evil pride in him. Perhaps he resented the loss of that awe-struck admiration to which he had come to think himself entitled. Two years is quite long enough to establish the fact that a wife is not really a fairy held in captivity, but it is by no means long enough to justify her in substituting reproaches, or tears, or silent disapproval, for the incense to which she has made a man accustomed.

At any rate, Flossie found that she had no influence whatsoever in this strange mood which had taken possession of Jack. So, as women have done from time immemorial, she turned to the church for help.

There had recently come into the Birmingham's neighborhood a frail and rather shy young clergyman, who thought to set the power of the spirit over against the world, the flesh, and the devil, as these are seen on the water front. Undoubtedly the spirit may be trusted to conquer in the long run, whatever the odds, but the Rev. Mr. Cotton was not of that order of muscular Christianity which frequently in fiction, and occasionally in fact, has compelled the respect of the devil by superior skill in the use of his own weapons. He knew nothing of the gentle art of boxing, he had never wrestled except in prayer, and he would not have known how to get the drop on a man, even if he could have imagined himself wishing to do such a thing. He was young, and embarrassedly conscious of that fact.

When Mr. Cotton realized that Flossie

was urging him to undertake to show Jack Birmingham the error of his ways, the young clergyman understood something of the emotion that Daniel must have felt when he made out that there really were lions in the corner of that den.

"I don't believe that I have ever had the—pleasure of meeting Mr. Birmingham," he temporized.

"No, but you know him by sight, don't you?" Flossie answered eagerly. "He's the tallest man on the street, and so strong! Why, the other day two men were quarreling in a saloon on Water Street, and he just took them, one in each hand, and bumped their heads together like—like dolls! Any one can point him out to you, if you don't know him."

"Yes, yes, I know who he is," Mr. Cotton admitted hastily. "I was only thinking—he has never been to the chapel, I believe, and he might think I was—"

"No, he was away when you came," Flossie explained apologetically. "He was off on a fishing trip, you know, and since he came back—well, he hasn't been quite himself."

She struggled with a sob.

"Yes, I understand; but—"

"That's why I have come to you, Mr. Cotton. He *isn't* himself, really. If he were, I could talk to him. But he is so—so *fierce*, if I say a word! He gets so angry that I'm frightened. He has never been like this before!"

There was terror beneath the tears in her blue eyes.

The picture was not reassuring to Mr. Cotton. He had seen Jack Birmingham on more than one occasion, and the idea of urging the beauty of holiness upon that high-tempered giant was dismaying. It is one thing to give battle to sin as an abstraction—a sort of vaporous cloud that won't hit back—and it is quite another thing to tell a man like Jack Birmingham that he is drinking too much. Mr. Cotton knew that he would have to do it. He had no doubt as to his duty; but there is no denying that he felt like a raw recruit on the eve of a battle.

"As soon as I see a good opportunity," he said, clearing his throat.

"Oh, don't wait! Don't put it off!" Flossie cried, clasping her hands in supplicating eagerness. "I'm afraid something terrible will happen. You don't know how afraid I am!"

"I shall make a point of speaking to him without delay," Mr. Cotton said.

Flossie's look of grateful admiration made him reflect that, after all, true courage is of the inner man, and that sometimes quite unmilitary persons are able, by sheer force of character, to dominate mere brute strength.

### III

THIS pleasant theory buoyed up Mr. Cotton's spirits until he actually found himself, on the following day, face to face with brute force in the person of Jack Birmingham. Though the young clergyman's breath fled from him and his thoughts whirled, to his credit be it said that he stood square in the path of the approaching sinner.

Birmingham was in that pleasantly exalted state which Jack London called "jingled." He looked down at the small man who had stopped his progress, and made an obvious effort to focus his vision upon the object.

"Well, sonny?" he said genially. "What do you want?"

Mr. Cotton stiffened. Even his meekness resented that term.

"You are Mr. Birmingham, I believe," he said, with as much dignity as was consistent with tipping his head up to see the man he addressed.

"My friends call me Jack," said Birmingham suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"I hope you will regard me as a friend," said Mr. Cotton. "May I speak to you for a few minutes?"

"Book agent?" Jack demanded.

"No. I wish merely—"

"Got something to sell, haven't you?"

"No, no! I am trying—"

"Here, want the price of a meal?"

"No! I am—"

"Hold on—let me guess," interrupted Jack. "Don't tell me! If I can't guess what you are after in three guesses, I'll know I've had a glass too much. Now—"

"That is what I wanted to speak to you about, Mr. Birmingham."

"Jack, if you are a friend."

"Jack, then. You *have* had a glass too much, and as a friend I tell you that you ought to ch-change your habits."

The words were bold, but the effect, unfortunately, was somewhat marred by Mr. Cotton's stammering nervousness.

Jack Birmingham bent down with his

hands on his knees, to bring his face nearer to that of his challenger.

"You're a parson—that's what you are!" he cried triumphantly. "I knew I could guess, give me a chance!" Then he frowned portentously. "What's that you are trying to say about my habits?"

"You drink—"

"And I bet that's more than you can do, too! Ever try it, parson?" Jack asked insolently.

"You drink more than you ought to."

"How do you know?" demanded Jack.

"Everybody knows."

"And everybody else knows that it's my own affair. You've got nerve, parson, even if you are an atom—more nerve than sense. What's to prevent my picking you up right now and dropping you over the fence into that mudhole?"

"Nothing, but it would prove that I am right. No man in his senses would do a thing like that unless he was drunk."

"Got me there!" muttered Jack. "See here, you celestial policeman, who put you on to me?"

Mr. Cotton did not answer promptly, and Jack reached down a sudden hand and caught him by his thin shoulder. Unconsciously he shook the little man as he would have shaken an obdurate child.

"Can't you speak? Was it just your infernal meddlesomeness, or did some one set you on? *Did my wife set you on me?*"

The big man's tone was ominous.

Mr. Cotton pulled himself free and straightened his shoulders inside his ruffled coat. This gave him a moment for consideration. Before his inner eye there came the vision of Flossie's frightened face and her tearful voice. This brute would probably beat her—

"Was it my wife?" demanded Birmingham, with deadly quiet.

"No, it was not your wife. Your wife has nothing to do with my speaking to you," said this minister of the gospel, looking Birmingham straight in the eye.

Jack held him with a penetrating look for a moment, and then dropped his hand again upon the small man's shoulder.

"We'll see about that," he said. "You come with me. If you have lied to me—"

He shut his teeth upon the words, and with more force than persuasiveness he conveyed Mr. Cotton to the cottage in the quiet street where he had set up house-keeping two years before. It was a pretty

cottage, with a front yard in which the roses grew with riotous freedom, and an inviting settle beside the doorway.

"Sit down there," said Jack Birmingham, indicating the settle with a peremptory gesture. "Stay there till I call you inside!"

Then he went into the cottage.

Mr. Cotton sank down upon the seat, not so much in obedience to the behest as because he was, for the moment, completely unnerved. By habit as well as principle, he was a speaker of the truth, and the lie which had slipped so spontaneously from his lips had recoiled upon his conscience with the shattering effect of an explosive. That he was likely to be found out was only a secondary disturbance, yet that, too, shook him. He had heard the common saying on the street that Jack Birmingham could abide anything rather than a coward or a liar.

"Floss!" Jack's imperious voice rang through the house and came out through the open door to the waiting Mr. Cotton.

"Yes, dear!" came the answer, accompanied by a sound of scurry. "Why, dear, what is it?"

Mr. Cotton could not see the speakers, but from the voices he judged that the two were standing in the hall just within the doorway.

"Floss, have you been complaining of me to that busybody parson of yours?"

"Jack!"

"Have you? Have—you—told—him—that—your—husband—drinks—too—much?"

Mr. Cotton rose softly from his seat and entered the open door. He would at least do what he could to restrain this brute from physical violence toward his wife. Perhaps he could divert the ruffian's anger to himself.

Jack saw him, and frowned ferociously. Flossie did not see him, and therefore took the frown to herself. She had a moment of dizzy terror. This was worse than anything she had imagined.

Then, suddenly, the womanly Florence who had been hidden so long under the pretty Flossie asserted herself, and it was the voice of the womanly Florence that answered steadily:

"Yes, Jack, I did. I'd do more than that. I'd do *anything* to make you see what you are doing. I shouldn't deserve to be your wife if I wasn't ready to do any-



thing and everything I can to bring you back to your senses!"

For a moment Jack Birmingham stared at his wife in amazed silence. Then he looked at Mr. Cotton, pale but determined, in the doorway. Then he threw back his head and laughed loud and long.

"Well, with a wife who isn't afraid to

tell the truth, and a parson who isn't afraid to tell a lie, I'm a lucky man! By George, I won't go back on either of you. I'll swear off from this day—and when I say I will, I will!"

And as Jack Birmingham demanded the truth of himself as well as from others, he did.

## A Life Line for Harriet

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO WAS AFRAID THAT SHE WOULD NEVER BE MARRIED

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

**H**ARRIET had made her début when she was nineteen. She had been kept back, as her mother phrased it, until Jessie was married. Sadie and Jessie had been "out" together, and it was inadvisable for the third sister to be in evidence until the other two were married off.

When Harriet left school, it was agreeable to know that Dotty was six years younger, and so couldn't come treading on her heels. How the years had raced by, and how developed Dotty was now for her seventeen years!

Harriet's first two winters had been, to her, like a dream come true. Dances galore and partners in plenty—what more could a girl wish? It was her mother, with wise, experienced eyes, who saw that the partners were constantly changing, that everybody liked Harriet and nobody was paying her devoted attention—unless one counted Joe Hayes, who hardly counted at all. Joe was sawed off in stature, with a large mouth, and one eye smaller than the other, giving him the expression of an unfinished gargoyle.

The Nelson home was friendly and hospitable, and the young people of the town had formed the habit of dropping in, sure of warmth and welcome. An unusual touch was given to the family life by the fact that "dad," as all the girls' friends called him, was no submerged tenth. He was a genial, entertaining host and a shark at bridge.

Without a care passed the winter when Harriet was nineteen and the winter when she was twenty. The next two seasons might have been called the Arthur Burton period. Burton came to Yarborough to live, met Harriet, and took an immediate liking to her. A few weeks later—he had seen her frequently in the meantime—he said in his abrupt fashion:

"Look here, I want to lay all the cards on the table. I'm engaged to be married to a girl at home, but the engagement isn't to be announced until she finishes college, and she still has two years. If you and I can be good pals—why, it will make all the difference in my life here; but I don't want to take up too much of your time."

"That's all right," promised Harriet easily. "I know how to be a good friend better than anything else. It's my long suit. I won't tell a soul about your engagement, and I appreciate your telling me." She looked at him with her happy blue eyes, full of good humor and the joy of living. "You know I'm not the sort of girl who goes in for quiet corners and love-making and petting. I like crowds, and fun, and a lot of noise—I just do!"

Harriet said it lightly. The realization of its absolute truth came to her gradually. Men didn't make love to her, except Joe now and then. She was too big. Perhaps the majority of men found five feet nine rather too much for a wife.

Harriet was straight as a pine sapling,

with a good fresh skin, laughing eyes, and a vibrant voice which was sometimes too loud. She brimmed with vitality, and there was always a crowd around her.

Burton, tall, handsome in a dark, saturnine way, found her so stimulating as a companion that his good resolutions not to engross her vanished into thin air. They went everywhere together. He was a distinguished-looking cavalier, particular about sending the right flowers, and in seeing to it that the girl whom he signaled for his favors should receive all the attention due her.

"Why should I take some girl to a dance who bores me to extinction, merely because she previously bored me by inviting me to dinner?" he would demand petulantly. "Why should you go with Hayes, whose head barely reaches to your chin, when your step and mine suit to perfection, and dancing together is a joy?"

At the end of Burton's second winter in Yarborough, when all the town was tranquilly expecting the announcement of their engagement, he came to Harriet's one evening, stirred out of his usual nonchalance.

"I'm in luck, I suppose," he began sullenly. "I've been offered a better salary in my home town. Leila will like that. You know she graduates in June."

There was no response. With hands which were not quite steady, Harriet was pulling the petals from a rose—Harriet, who liked flowers.

"It will seem strange not to see you. We—we have been together so much. We have been such pals." His voice had a queer note, almost as if he were angry. "I had rather never to have known you than to find it so hard to tell you good-by. It's like a wrench—like being uprooted." He broke off abruptly. "Good-by. It's the last time. Kiss me once, Hallie, will you?"

She lifted her face to his. On the train he recalled that she had not spoken at all.

When she was alone again, she spoke aloud and saw clearly—and to see clearly was what saved her.

"He was thinking only of himself! He has thought of himself all along! He didn't even realize how lonely I would be without him!"

When Burton married, Yarborough voiced the unanimous opinion that he had "consoled himself pretty soon." Of course, everybody knew that when Harriet had

rejected him, in the spring, he had left town in a huff, without saying good-by to his friends.

## II

JESSIE had a cottage on the coast that summer, and Harriet spent three months with her—a lazy summer out of doors, playing with Jessie's bewitching babies. Then home in the autumn—the same home, but amazingly different.

Dotty seemed to have sprung up overnight. She had enjoyed the full run of the house during vacation, and now it was her friends who were everywhere—the Eel's Knees, as they delighted to call themselves. Harriet's set seemed to have dissolved by some mysterious alchemy. The married ones belonged to the younger married set, and those who were left were either engaged or had gone to work.

Harriet was to be a bridesmaid at Susie Neal's wedding, and maid of honor at Meg Dalton's. Dotty was sent off to school—a tearful and protesting Dotty, who begged to stay at home and go as a day scholar to the Gilbert School for Girls, which in her mother's day had been the Young Ladies' Select Seminary.

After her youngest daughter was dispatched, Mrs. Nelson took up the matter with Harriet.

"Dotty will be eighteen next fall, and I don't see how I can insist on her going back to school. Ed Canfield seems very much in earnest. He's eight years older than Dot, and he's begging her to promise to marry him. He was at the station to see her off, and he brought her a huge corsage bouquet of orchids. It was much too old for Dotty—that's why it pleased her so."

"Ed Canfield!" said Harriet slowly. "Dot's so pretty, mother!"

Mrs. Nelson suddenly kissed her, understanding the generosity of Harriet's unspoken thought. She must put no stumbling block in Dot's path. The other two girls had married well, but Ed Canfield was the son of Yarborough's wealthiest citizen, and an attractive fellow as well.

Harriet could not sit around a home swarming with the Eel's Knees, and with Dotty's probable engagement making her own lack of success the more noticeable. For the first time in her happy, heedless days she faced herself as a social failure.

"Mother!" she cried, bewildered "Why, I'm going to be an old maid!"

"Nonsense, dear," soothed her mother. "There's from now until June before Dot comes home for good; and Joe so perfectly devoted to you—" At the aghast look on Harriet's face she continued smoothly: "And who knows what nice man you may happen to meet, child? *Prince Charming* may be around the next corner!"

"If he is," said Harriet very slowly, very thoughtfully, her mind glancing backward over the past four years, "he'll dance with me, he'll play tennis with me, he'll take me out in his car, he'll tell me I'm the best pal a fellow ever had, especially when he's blue; and then, after a while, he'll come in beaming to tell me he's in love with Meg or Clare—oh, any of the girls, but it won't be me!"

"There's Joe." This time her mother's voice had the tender defiance of the days when she used to bind up a cut finger with the assurance, "There, there! Nothing shall hurt mother's baby girl!" There was a shade of reproof, too, in Mrs. Nelson's tone. "Joe has never looked at any one but you in his life. You shouldn't talk as if nobody cared for you when a fine, honorable man like Joe has been in love with you ever since you were a schoolgirl."

"Imagine Joe by Ed Canfield!"

"I can imagine him very well," her mother replied steadily. "Of course, Ed has more money and better looks, but a girl doesn't marry just the present generation. Those who were behind a man go into his inheritance, and into his children's inheritance. I don't suppose there's a young man in Yarrowborough with as fine an ancestry as Joe's—a long line of good men, holding high positions of trust in the State, and of dignified gentlewomen. Joe is better born than Ed, and we both know it."

"I'll never marry a one-eyed runt like Joe as long as I live!" declared Harriet hotly. "Of course, I'm awfully fond of him in a way. He was so understanding about—about Arthur Burton."

Harriet did not realize that nothing had added so much to her desirability in Joe's eyes as the preference shown her by a handsome, sophisticated man like Burton.

"Mother, what shall I do next winter?" Harriet asked slowly.

"I've been thinking a great deal about that, daughter. If we're to give Dotty the same pleasures you girls had, it would be a big help to dad if you could be independent for a year. Would you like to stay

with your Aunt Mattie at Warrenton, and teach domestic science in the high school? Her husband is on the school board, and you do get along so wonderfully with children. But there's time enough to think about that. Trot along, now, darling, and bring me your cerise frock. It's going to be hard to fix spiral ruffles after such a long period of chemise frocks."

Harriet wore the finished gown to the rehearsal of Meg's wedding, to which she went with Joe.

"Did you know that Meg had arranged for us to wait on her together, and I balked?" asked Joe. "'Once to the altar, never again.' I'm not superstitious, but I'll take no chance against the one thing I want most in the world!"

It swept over Harriet that for her own sake, as well as Joe's, she must settle matters finally. She slipped her hand through his arm, as if the friendly contact might soften the words:

"That can never be, Joe. Please always be my very best friend, because that's all I can be to you—*ever*."

She could not see his face in the darkness. She could only hear the strained note in his voice:

"Ever since I was a man I've had that one clear picture in my mind—a home, you in it, lots of jolly flowers in the yard, and maybe—"

He broke off, and presently spoke again in his matter-of-fact way:

"Father wants me to go to Buenos Aires early next month. He has a cousin out there who seems to be quite influential, and who has written for me to come. Mother thinks it will do me good to get out of the rut of office work and see a little of the world. I hadn't decided—until now."

"Buenos Aires!" echoed Harriet dismally. "Why, Joe, that's almost at the bottom end of South America! It's on the other side of the equator! I never even heard of anybody who went to Buenos Aires."

But go he did, on the next steamer. His friends gave him a farewell dinner and trooped to the train to say good-by. Perhaps Joe himself was surprised to realize how many friends he had.

### III

THE immediate effect of Joe's departure, where Harriet was concerned, was that she had no escort for the next dance. It was

the first time that had happened since her debut more than four years before.

Then, Mrs. Nelson took a quiet but capable hand in affairs. She was not the obvious "managing mother." She provided for her girls the background of a hospitable home and an unfailing welcome, and let things take their course. It had been like a well oiled machine which runs as easily as a motor coasts down hill. Now there was method in the choice of guests at her famous Sunday night suppers and jolly small dinners. Harriet was well aware that it was through her mother's unflagging interest and clever aid that her fifth winter went by, and people were still talking of her popularity and saying how well she held her own against the younger set.

Sometimes the praise rankled, as when a married woman remarked to her:

"I said the other night at the theater that you are the only girl in town who is always invited to everything that comes."

"Not a very exciting suitor," laughed Harriet. "It was Judge Barnard, a friend of dad's, and deaf as a post, but I've always been fond of him."

"His big car seems to be at your disposal," teased the other; "and he's a widower."

Harriet felt suddenly sick. Judge Barnard, sixty-one years old! What did it matter to her whether he had two wives under the sod or one in the flesh?

One March morning she met Joe's mother on the street—a woman whom she had always admired.

"Good morning, Harriet. What do you think of Joe's offer?" Mrs. Hayes asked with characteristic directness.

"I—I haven't heard about it," Harriet stammered.

It suddenly occurred to her that there had been a longer lapse than usual between Joe's letters.

"Our cousin wishes him to stay there. He has taken a great fancy to Joe, and made him an excellent offer to go into his office. Of course, he always has the place with his father open to him, and now that we are growing elderly the Argentine seems a long way to one's only son; but, like all mothers, I want him to choose what is best for his advancement and happiness."

Harriet walked home in a daze. She found Joe's last letter and reread it. There was not a word of love in it. It might have been written to a maiden aunt.

One paragraph stood out in scorching letters:

They say the Chileans are the prettiest women in South America, but they must be peaches if they can beat some of the girls I met at that dance—the real Spanish type, eyes as big as brown velvet moons.

Harriet had laughed over that when she read it for the first time, and had forgotten it. Now it swept over her, pitiless as a tidal wave. Joe was going to stay away forever. He was going to marry a girl from Argentina or Chile—oh, it didn't matter if she were a Patagonian!

She, Harriet Nelson, was never to marry at all. She faced the inexorable, inescapable fact.

She was made for domesticity. She wanted to go into her own, own kitchen and make cakes and put up marmalade. She knew the very pattern of kitchen cupboard she would choose. Of course, other girls went to work and were satisfied in it, but she knew she would abominate an office or teaching school. The very thought of it choked her, terrified her. She liked a home, and fussing around the pantry, and embroidering table linen, and transplanting seedlings, and bathing babies.

Never to develop her own ideas in anything, from a vegetable garden to the furniture of a sun porch! Never to have one's own baby, and to keep it as sweet and fresh as a little warm rose! That had been in Joe's dreams, too. She remembered how his voice had trembled as he broke off:

"And maybe—"

Her father had given her a little money, the week before, for her birthday gift. She went straight to the telegraph office and spent her entire capital on a cable to Buenos Aires.

Please come home, Joe. I miss you.

HALLIE.

#### IV

THERE WAS NO answer. Joe's guardian angel must have been at his elbow, cautioning him not to cable. He caught the first available steamer, instead, but for weeks Harriet had lived in wretched uncertainty. The cable had never reached him, or it had reached him and he thought it kinder to take no notice of it, being infatuated with some designing South American girl!

When he appeared one morning, directly from the train, he found Harriet alone in



the library. She had on a pink gingham morning frock, which made her look younger and brought out the wholesome color of her skin and the blueness of her eyes. She gave a half articulate sob when she saw who it was, and went straight into Joe's open arms.

"Oh, honey," he said, "I'm so tired of black-eyed girls! Just let me look at you!"

She called that tremendous impulse of relief and joy at seeing him "falling in love," and she honestly believed it. It never occurred to her that she felt toward Joe as the drowning might feel to a rope.

Events followed in their well-known order. The engagement was announced at a delightful luncheon. There ensued a round of entertaining for the bride elect, and the wedding was in the last week in June, with an ecstatic Dotty as maid of honor. Everybody said that it was an ideal match and they had always expected it.

In the account of the wedding the morning paper spoke of Harriet as "Yarbor-

ough's acknowledged belle," and the groom thrilled with pride at having won her over all competitors. Yarborough people spoke of the massive silver pitcher which Judge Barnard sent as "most magnanimous under the circumstances." Even dignified Mrs. Hayes had a sense of gratification that the distinguished jurist was the latest feather ascribed to Harriet's cap.

Mrs. Nelson interpreted Harriet's fears during the winter as "the time when she was so nervous and low-spirited because Joe was away." Harriet, who was not a thinker, accepted her mother's theory. It was unimportant, anyhow, for anybody can find new reasons for things, but china lasts; and the really important matter was the dinner set that Joe and herself must choose.

Never for them the crystalline air of the high hills; but neither of them would ever know that the heights were there, being busily occupied with their days in the pleasant valley country, where one finds a denser population and perhaps a better chance of "living happy ever after."

#### A PEDDLER CRIES IN THE CITY

LADY, here's a lilac  
That knows a rural lane,  
That sweetens all nostalgia  
And soothes the heart with pain;  
And daffodils for maidens  
By walls deprived of light,  
And roses to caress a cheek  
Where tears have lain at night.

I've violets from meadows  
That gladden under trees,  
To take the pallor from your woes,  
The stiffness from your knees;  
And here, *madame*, a tulip  
Is very, very nice;  
For two I get a nickel—  
And cheap at half the price!

You say they soon will wither?  
Well, so will you, *madame*!  
Who else will buy a flower?  
Then let your window slam!  
You lodgers in the back rooms,  
Who for the fields may thirst,  
Who'll buy a wind-tossed daisy?  
Pray, who will be the first?

Charles Divine

# The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

**S**AM CALTROP, manager of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, and Rum Gordon, the foreman, order Buff Warren, one of their cowboys, to drive off a family of "nesters," who have defied the cattlemen by settling on the range, and have actually dared to plow up a patch of it. Buff finds that Abijah Fair, head of the offending family, is blind, and the eldest daughter, Gilian, is such a pretty girl that the cowboy loses his heart to her. Moved by sympathy and love, instead of molesting the Fairs, he declares himself on their side, and helps them with their plowing. This act of treason, as it seems to all good cattlemen, necessitates the resignation of his job at the Eighty-Eight.

The next day sees Buff again at the Fairs' place, where he learns that some unknown enemy has just driven off their little bunch of cattle. He follows the raider—who proves to be one Andy Tresawna, a gambler—and, after a sharp encounter, turns him over to the sheriff as a cattle thief. Gilian Fair is grateful for this service, but she refuses to marry Buff; and he is further disquieted by finding evidence of secret meetings between her and some unknown man, whom he suspects of being identical with a notorious outlaw known as the Twisted Foot.

Joe Mac., the sheriff, has a horse of whose speed he is proud. Seeking new employment, Buff Warren induces Joe to promise that if Buff's horse, Buster, can beat his champion, he will appoint the former cowboy and his cousin, Bill Holliday, deputy sheriffs. After the race—which Buster wins—Buff meets Holliday, and the latter, who is recklessly celebrating with a bottle of whisky, reveals that he tricked the sheriff by making his horse drink a quantity of water just before the contest.

## XVI (continued)

**B**UFF WARREN departed in search of a pail of water. He soon returned with one.

"Here, Bill," said he, setting it down in front of his cousin. "Stick the old noddle in that."

"Anything to 'blige," replied the genial Holliday, and promptly sank his head in over his ears. "Tha's fine!" he declared, coming up to blow.

Bill went back to his seat on the whisky keg, where he sat up stiffly straight, with runnels of water trickling down inside his shirt, and breathed hard through his nostrils. Buff Warren had high hopes that the cold water application might have sobered his relative in some degree; but the latter's first words were enough to dispel that delusion.

"Whu-when shall we three meet again?" he stuttered sadly, and violently shook the totally empty bottle. No answering guggle meeting his listening ear, he threw the bot-

tle from him. "I've had enough," he added with firmness.

"I think you have," agreed Buff. "This is a fine time for you to get plastered—a fine time!"

"Cuc-couldn't be better," smiled his cousin. "Gul-lad you agree with me. Go by-by now."

So saying, Holliday slipped sidewise from the keg, slumped full length on the grass, and composed himself to slumber. His head was resting on a rock.

In stooping to remove the rock, Buff brushed aside with his hands the tall grass growing close to the trunk of the largest cottonwood, and glimpsed what had been hidden by the grass—a small triangular crack in the base of the trunk. He would not have given the crevice a second thought, had he not seen within it a bit of white.

When he had disposed of the rock and laid his cousin's head on a couple of handfuls of pulled grass, he inserted his fingers in the crack and withdrew the object of which the bit of white that he had seen was

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part. It proved to be a folded piece of paper. This he opened and spread out on his knee.

Printed on it, in pencil, were these words:

Just heard that J. C. Marysville is taking ten thousand head of steers to Paradise Bend on the 18th.

There was no signature, unless a large figure 2, written below the printing, was intended to serve as such.

Buff put back the note where he had found it. Who "J. C. Marysville" was he did not know; but he knew that ten thousand head of steers were an unbelievably large herd to take to Paradise Bend. While cattle were frequently driven out of the Paradise Bend country, none, to his knowledge, was ever driven in.

Again, why not mail what purported to be a simple business communication through the post office, instead of stuffing it into a hollow tree? And why not sign it openly, instead of lurking in furtive fashion behind a number? If it had been a love letter, Buff would have understood the mystery.

He reflected on the puzzle as he went to find the sheriff, and forgot it completely the instant he crossed the official threshold. Later he found good cause to wish that he had given more thought to the mysterious letter. If he had done so, many things would not have come to pass.

The sheriff, at his desk in the office, looked up as Buff entered. He did not appear especially pleased.

"Mornin', Buff," said he. "What's this I hear about you throwin' in with this nester at McFluke's place?"

"How you mean, throwin' in?" demanded Buff, instantly on the alert.

"Helping him plow his land—which is a plenty."

"Oh, that! True enough—I did it with my lil plow."

The sheriff frowned at this levity.

"Of course I knew you'd got his cattle back for him. That was all right. I don't like nesters much, but we can't allow rustlers to run off their stock. What I didn't know, when I made that bet with you, was that you'd quit the Eighty-Eight—"

"Sure you knew," interrupted Buff. "I told you myself, there in the gully by Pack-saddle."

"I know you told me you'd quit," the sheriff admitted, with some acerbity; "but

you didn't tell me you'd quit after a row with Sam over your plowin' this nester's land for him. I didn't know that, Buff. I been in and out of town so much and so quick I ain't heard a bit of the news. You ought to told me, Buff!"

"If I had, you wouldn't have made this bet?"

"You can gamble I wouldn't! I hear, too, you held up Sam and Rum when they were going down to run the nester off."

"Who told you—a lil bird?"

"Nemmene who told me. I was told all right. Fine goings-on for my deputy to be mixed up in!"

"I wasn't your deputy then," pointed out Buff.

"But you will be—and Bill Holliday, too, damn the luck! Bill—there's another one! I might have guessed he had a special reason for wanting a job—messing up Sam and Rum so bad neither of 'em will be out for a week!"

"That's sure tough," grieved Buff.

"I expect you're feeling mighty mournful about it," said the sheriff, with sarcasm. "Look here, Buff, I got a proposition for you and Bill. What will you take to let me off this bet?"

"I don't know what Bill will take," was the prompt reply, "but I won't take a thing."

"I'll see you get another job somewhere—a good job."

"Oh, it ain't that. I can get a job for myself, 'most any time, 'most anywhere. It just happens I want to be a deputy—that's all."

"But see here, Buff—look how hard it makes it for me," said the sheriff anxiously. "I don't mind saying the Eighty-Eight ain't the only outfit that's been objecting to your appointment."

"I thought you said Rum and Sam had been put to bed for a week."

"Well," said the sheriff sheepishly, "I suppose I might as well tell you. Mis' Caltrop was in town this morning, getting some medicine for the invalids, and she heard about this appointment. She came to see me right away, and I don't mind saying she said a whole lot. She sure walked into me like a horse into a corral! I'm glad she ain't my wife. You see how it is, Buff. All these outfits are friends of mine. I get along with 'em all right, and with election coming on I need their votes. If I appoint you, they won't take into consid-

eration how you won the appointment on a bet. The only thing they'll see is that I appointed you—a fellow who likes nesters; and they won't vote for me. See?"

Buff nodded.

"I see," he said soberly enough, not in the least intending, however, to relinquish his appointment.

Although he had won it through the questionable methods of his cousin, he had no compunction in forcing the sheriff to keep his word. With Gilian's welfare, as he saw it, and the welfare of her family in the balance, nothing else mattered. In no other way than by wearing the star of a deputy would he be able to help the Fairs.

"Well?" said the sheriff. "How about it, Buff?"

"I don't like to disoblige you, Joe, but I guess I'll have to have the job. That goes for Bill, too."

"All right! My word's good. Get Bill, and I'll swear you in."

"Bill's keeping that engagement of his. He'll be along."

"Then we'll leave it till after the trial. If you see Nap anywhere, Buff, I wish you'd tell him I'd like to see him."

## XVII

JUDGE DOLAN, pale-faced, black-haired, surveyed his office with blank black eyes. He neither coughed, nor fiddled with the papers on his desk. He was a jurist of a somewhat unusual type. Although a small, unimpressive man, the known fact that he could drive nails with a derringer at twenty yards added cubits to his stature.

The court room was packed. As many residents of Farewell and the vicinity as could squeeze themselves in, had done so. Among the more solid citizens were Alicran Skeel, foreman and manager of the Hogpen Ranch; Jim Richie, of the Cross-in-a-Box; Mike Flynn, of the Blue Pigeon Store; Joy Blythe, Mike's partner; two ex-sheriffs and their former chief deputies; Piney Jackson, the blacksmith; Bill Lainey, the hotel keeper; Calloway, postmaster and storekeeper; Captain Benjamin Burr; Carlson, the owner of the livery stable; Chuck Morgan, a small rancher, and several of his friends.

All these filled two benches and overflowed on the window sills or into the crowd of standees. On another bench, almost directly in front of the judgment desk, sat Andy Tresawna, with his head bandaged, flanked by Sheriff Mack and his fat chief

deputy, Nap Tobias. Sitting beside the sheriff was Pencil Yandle, a lawyer and one-time resident of Philadelphia, yellow-faced, yellow-haired, smooth as oil, and twice as slippery. Behind the bench upon which the prisoner sat were grouped several of his friends—gentlemen living by their wits—and Hilario Chavez, the ex-bartender of the Starlight Saloon.

It was to be remarked that none of the Eighty-Eight outfit was in the court room.

On a fourth bench, in line with the prisoner's bench, sat Buff Warren, young Bobby Fair, Gilian, and Mrs. Fair. The Wilhemina twin and Jemima were not present. They had remained at home to take care of their father, and Rainbow had stayed with them.

Judge Dolan, having inspected the audience, pulled a pad toward him, picked up a pencil, and fixed his eyes on the sheriff.

"What's the trouble?" he asked in a conversational tone.

The sheriff stood up and made reply at some length. The judge wrote rapidly upon his pad.

"Any witnesses?" he asked, looking up.

The sheriff indicated Bob Fair and Buff Warren.

"We'll take the young one first," said the judge. "Stand up, young man. Look me in the eye, and don't be scared. I won't hurt you. Do you know the nature of an oath?"

The small boy shifted from one foot to the other, and gulped painfully. Under the stare of so many strange eyes he shrank and wilted.

Judge Dolan showed himself remarkably human. He arose, went to the frightened youngster, picked him up, and set him on the edge of the judge's desk, with his back to the court room.

"There!" said the jurist. "Don't pay any attention to the other people in the room. They don't count. Now hold up your right hand and repeat after me."

Under this kindly urging young Bob acquitted himself like a major. He took the oath without a falter, and still without a falter told the judge exactly what he had seen. His story was sufficiently damaging to the rustler of the cattle, but he mentioned no names.

When he made an end, the judge turned him about to face the spectators.

"Do you see in this court room the man who ran off the cattle?"



The boy lifted his arm and pointed a steady finger at Tresawna.

"That's him," he said convincingly, if ungrammatically.

Instantly Pencil Yandle was on his feet, but the judge forestalled him.

"Not yet, Mr. Yandle," said the jurist. "I'll hear you later. Bobby, you did very well. You may go back to the bench. Mr. Warren, stand forward, and hold up your right hand."

Buff, having been sworn, gave his share of the evidence, and identified Tresawna as the man whom he had discovered driving the cattle away from the Fair place. When he sat down, the judge turned to the prisoner's attorney.

"Witnesses for the defense now, Mr. Yandle!"

Pencil Yandle—"Pencil" representing the natural shrinkage undergone by Pennsylvania in a dry atmosphere—responded by leaping to his feet. It was his second leap, and it was even more energetic than his first. The leap was followed by a legal bow.

"Your honor," said the lawyer, and paused. He swept back his yellow hair, threw out his chest, flung back the lapels of his coat, and stuck three fingers into his vest. "Your honor," he repeated, "I will show that there is malice in this case. I will show that the evidence on the side of the plaintiff is a tissue of lies, fabricated out of whole cloth, and a base slander against the fair name of my client, our respected citizen, Mr. Andrew Tresawna, who, I may say—"

"You may not say," the judge interrupted with firmness. "Your esteemed client is known to us all. Stick to the point, Mr. Yandle!"

"Your honor," said Yandle, nothing abashed, "I will endeavor to do so. Permit me to state, sir, that my blood boils when I think of the vile manner in which my client has been defamed—defamed, sir, and reduced to such agony of mind and spirit as my poor linguistic powers are unable to portray."

"You're making a healthy stab at it," tucked in the judge. "Keep your feet on the ground, Mr. Yandle, and call your witnesses, if you have any."

"I was on the point of doing so, your honor," declared Yandle, affecting a look of pain; "but first I merely wish to make plain to your honor the atrocious, malig-

nant, and utterly reckless fashion in which this pillar of our society, my client, has been libeled."

Yandle snuffled loudly, and reached for his hip pocket.

"You're about three jumps ahead of your regular schedule," interposed the judge heartlessly. "I've never known you to shed tears until well into the trial. This is only the hearing."

Nevertheless Yandle drew out his handkerchief, dabbed at his red-rimmed, watery eyes, and blew his nose.

"Your honor," he said in a trembling voice, "emotion overcomes me. I am affected to the depths of my being. Not content with slandering my client, one of the plaintiffs has endeavored to affect the outcome of the trial by shooting one of my witnesses."

"Better tell your witness to pull quicker next time," advised the unsympathetic judge. "Have you any other witnesses?"

"Of course, your honor. I—"

"Then call your witnesses!" thundered the judge.

"At once, your honor," said Pencil Yandle, and turned to the spectators. "Hilario Chavez!" he called in a loud tone.

With a smirk and a leer the dark-faced Mexican stepped forward. He was sworn, and gave evidence to the effect that at the time when Bob Fair and Buff Warren were supposed to have seen Andrew Tresawna driving the Fair cattle, he, Andrew Tresawna, was with him, Hilario Chavez, and four other men, playing poker in the Chavez cabin in Farewell.

After dwelling once more upon the flagitious villainy of Buff Warren in shooting Stony Flint, an important witness for the defense, Yandle successively called the three unpunctured gentlemen of the four referred to by Hilario Chavez. The trio, George Bushong, Tex Piper, and Mac Kergow, testified to the same effect as had Chavez.

"I believe, your honor," Yandle said blandly, when the testimony of the three had been taken, "that the evidence that you have just heard is conclusive. Therefore I ask that you dismiss the case."

Buff Warren, exceedingly hot and angry, stood up.

"Your honor, there are two other witnesses who can testify that during part of the time Tresawna's friends say they were playing poker with him, he was in a gully

near Packsaddle Creek. I would like to call the sheriff and Cap'n Burr."

Buff expected Yandle to object, but he did nothing of the sort. He sat twiddling his thumbs, his expression that of the cat that has just made away with the canary.

So the captain and the sheriff were called. The first swore that he saw Tresawna in the aforesaid gully at twelve o'clock noon, and remained with him until the gambler was locked up in the Farewell jail that afternoon, except for a few minutes at one time and a few minutes at another time, which gaps were covered by the testimony of Buff and the sheriff. Moreover, the sheriff accounted for Tresawna's time from half past twelve on.

Yandle now arose and preened himself.

"Your honor, the distinguished gentlemen who have so recently given their testimony have apparently made out an excellent case for the plaintiff. Far be it from me even to dream of casting the shadow of a doubt upon their evidence, but"—an impressive pause—"but I must respectfully submit that it does not bear upon the point in question, that it is utterly irrelevant. Therefore I ask that said testimony be excluded from the record."

"Please state your reasons, Mr. Yandle," requested the judge.

"With pleasure, your honor." Yandle spread his legs and tucked both hands beneath his coat tails. "If your honor will consult your notes, you will find that Mr. Warren testified that he came upon the defendant not later than half past ten o'clock by the sun. The boy, Bobby Fair, swears that he saw the defendant before Mr. Warren saw him, and did not see him again until to-day, here in the court room. Am I right, your honor?"

His honor nodded.

"The testimony of my four witnesses covers the movements of Andrew Tresawna from half past eight in the morning until eleven o'clock of the same day. What Mr. Tresawna did after that time I do not know, nor is it any concern of mine."

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded the judge, "that it would be possible for Andy Tresawna to have been seen in Farewell at eleven o'clock, and in that gully on Packsaddle at noon?"

"I mean precisely that, your honor," Yandle averred with his blandest smile.

"What horse could do twenty miles in an hour?" persisted the judge.

"I do not know, your honor. For all I know to the contrary, my client may have ridden relays of horses in order to reach the gully—ahem—on time, as it were."

"As it were" is good," said the judge, with a sarcastic smile.

"Your honor agrees? I accept the compliment and thank your honor. As I was saying, it lies within my province merely to prove that when the boy Bobby Fair says he saw Andrew Tresawna driving the cattle, and when Mr. Warren says he saw him doing the same thing, my client was miles away in Farewell, peacefully playing cards at the home of a friend. Allow me to reiterate, your honor, that the respective testimonies of Captain Burr and the sheriff are irrelevant, in that they cover only the time from noon on. They do not in any way touch upon what is alleged to have occurred previously. Again permit me to submit that no case has been made against my client, and to request that he be released from custody."

"Your point is well taken, Mr. Yandle," admitted Judge Dolan; "yet there is one flaw in its purity. Throughout the time Hilario Chavez and George Bushong say they were playing poker with the defendant—in fact, it was about seven in the morning when their presence was called to my attention—both these men were lying dead drunk in the grass behind my corral. During the morning I saw these two men at least a dozen times. It was not until after one o'clock that they recovered sufficiently to go down to the stage company trough and soak their fevered heads. Instead of dismissing the case, I will direct the sheriff to take George Bushong and Hilario Chavez into custody on a charge of perjury. I am watching you, Bushong! If your hand drops any lower, it will not be necessary to take you into custody."

The sheriff seized Bushong and disarmed him. Nap Tobias approached Chavez to serve him similarly, when suddenly the Mexican ducked under the arm of a friend and snaked toward a window. The judge sprang upon his desk, but by this time there were at least seven innocent bystanders between him and Chavez.

First of the seven was Buff Warren. He had flung himself after the Mexican at the latter's first move. As Chavez threw himself head first across the window sill, Buff's fingers closed on one leg. Instantly the Mexican whirled back, whipped a knife

from beneath his shirt, and made a furious stab at Buff's chest.

Buff dodged to one side, taking with him, however, the Mexican's foot and ankle. Chavez, squirming and wriggling, came down smack on his back. The efficient Buff sent the knife flying from the dark hand with a perfectly directed kick, whisked Chavez over on his face, and pinioned his hands behind him.

"Good work, Buff!" Nap Tobias panted in his ear. "Separate his wrists a little, so I can get the cuffs on him."

When the flurry had subsided, the judge looked about him with keen satisfaction.

"I don't see your other two witnesses, Mr. Yandle," he observed with sarcasm.

"I expect they must have had business," said Yandle, looking a little blue.

"I expect so," concurred the judge. "Since there is no further business before this court, I hereby order that the three prisoners be committed to jail, there to await the action of the grand jury."

Yandle was on his feet, gesticulating with abandon.

"But, your honor, the prisoners have a right to be admitted to bail. If your honor will set the amount, I will see that it is forthcoming."

The judge leaned back and smiled.

"Certainly your clients have a right to bail. I will hold Andrew Tresawna in five thousand dollars, and the other two, Hilario Chavez and George Bushong, in ten thousand dollars apiece."

The attorney's jaw dropped.

"But this is without precedent. This—"

The judge's voice was deadly.

"Mr. Attorney, do you wish me to hold you in contempt?"

"I beg your honor's pardon, but it is with—it is unusual to set such a large amount of bail."

"I have given them all that the law allows," the judge said coldly.

"Very well, your honor. Here is a letter from Mr. Caltrop, owner of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, offering cattle as bail. You will perceive that the space for the number is left blank. If your honor will insert whatever number he sees fit—"

Judge Dolan returned the letter to the attorney.

"If Mr. Caltrop wishes to go bail for these people, he should appear in person before the court."

"But Mr. Caltrop—"

"Not a word, sir! The fact that Mr. Caltrop is a wealthy man and a leading citizen is of no moment. This court recognizes neither wealth nor social position. Furthermore, the law permits me to use my discretion regarding the form that bail shall take. Bail for these prisoners must be in cash."

"In cash, your honor—twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Exactly—twenty-five thousand dollars, in cash."

"You mean a check?"

"I mean gold."

"But—but such an amount cannot be obtained this side of Piegan City, if there!"

"The court is not interested in your difficulties, Mr. Attorney. Any more business? No? Court's adjourned."

### XVIII

"YANDLE, if there are any bigger fools than you, I don't know 'em! You wouldn't assay two ounces of horse sense to the ton. Why didn't you do what I told you to do, and make out I only just happened to be riding along behind the cattle? All Buff's evidence and the kid's would have tallied with that; but no, you had to spraddle out with an alibi, and now look at the damn thing! Look at it!"

Having thus made known his state of mind, Andy Tresawna spat on the cell floor and glared at his lawyer like an angry cat.

"But I thought—"

"What with?"

"Now, look here, Tresawna! I won't take—"

"You'll take what I choose to give you—that's what you'll take. Damn your soul, getting me cooped up here in the calaboose, and all so you could make a splurge and show folks what a fine lawyer you are!"

"But they can't hold you in jail."

"They're doing it, ain't they?"

"Well—er—the judge seems to have it in for you."

"That's your honest opinion, is it? You're a bright boy! You tell Sam Caltrop to raise that bail and get me out of here. He needn't think I'm going to do his dirty work and pay for it besides!"

"I'll speak to Sam."

"You will, Mr. Yandle, or I'll make you hard to find when I do get out!"

"There is no need of threats," said the lawyer, with dignity. "We're all in this together."

"But me and George and Lario are the only ones in jail. I suppose you think they're tickled to death with the situation!"

"I've seen them. In spite of the fact that they have only themselves to thank for their arrest, they are every bit as unreasonable as you are."

"Unreasonable! *Unreasonable!* You liver-lipped rat!" cried the provoked Tresawna, and reached for Pencil Yandle.

The lawyer evaded his client's rush by a brisk backward skip. With a flip of his right hand he plucked a seven-inch dirk from under his vest, and flourished it menacingly. Tresawna fell back.

"You little devil!" he exclaimed, with some admiration. "I didn't think you had it in you!"

"You'll have it in you, if you try to hop on me again," the lawyer declared grimly. "Sit down and be quiet. That's better. You may as well know, Andy, that I chose our five witnesses because all five were drunk that entire day. They told me none of them left the cabin until late in the afternoon. That is why I supposed I had a steel-cut alibi for you. Neither George Bushong nor Hilario Chavez have the slightest recollection of sleeping behind the judge's corral; nor do they remember soaking their heads in the trough. When they came to, they were in the cabin. So there you are!"

"You mean here I am," remarked Tresawna with bitterness.

"Don't you worry. The grand jury won't indict you when it meets next month. Even if it does, we'll beat the case."

"Even if it does! You mean to say there's any chance of my being indicted?"

"If the jurymen are feeling moral, they may indict you for the mere looks of the thing; but don't let that worry you."

"Oh, no, sure not! First there wasn't any chance of my being dumped, and now, when I am dumped good and proper, it's possible I may be indicted into the bargain. Why, hell's bells, for the matter of that, if the trial jury is feeling moral, I may even be convicted!"

"Let us hope it won't come to that."

"Hope nothing! You tell Caltrop that unless I'm turned loose mighty prompt and soon, I'll tell what I know. I'll tangle him in this business so deep a team of mules can't pull him out!"

"Who do you think would believe you, Mr. Tresawna?"

"The district attorney."

"You've lost your sense of proportion. Mr. Caltrop is a leading member of our social order, while you—forgive me if I wound your feelings—are not. The district attorney would not dream of asking for an indictment against Mr. Caltrop on such evidence as you might give him. Even if the law would permit him to take cognizance of the uncorroborated testimony of an accomplice, it would be incredible that Mr. Caltrop had hired you to run off a nester's few cows. Why, you jest!"

Tresawna's smile was peculiar. There was something about it at variance with his tone and words, when he said:

"But George Bushong and—"

"I think no one but yourself was with Mr. Caltrop at the time he—ahem—made the suggestion which you so unfortunately followed."

"I guess I can get all the testimony I want, if it comes to a pinch. You haven't got a mortgage on all the false witnesses. How about your fixing up this alibi with Chavez and the others? Suppose they snitch on you?"

"In that case," said the lawyer wearily, "I shall be compelled to bring half a dozen witnesses to swear that at the time when the five men say I was with them, framing your alibi, I was, as a matter of fact, elsewhere. What could be simpler?"

"It would be simpler if you hadn't got your last selection in jail," said Tresawna. "Folks are going to think of that and go slow. Now, you listen to me. I ain't making any threats—not a threat. You get me out, you and Caltrop! If I go to jail, I won't stay there forever; and—you might not be ready with your knife another time!"

"Did you fix it, Pencil?" asked Sam Caltrop, as soon as he stood inside the closed and locked door of the lawyer's office.

Yandle nodded.

"Of course I fixed it. Take that chair—it's comfortable. How do you feel?"

"Good enough," grumbled Caltrop, sinking carefully into the proffered chair.

"You look pretty seedy round the edges yet. That beard you seem to be growing isn't an improvement, either. I see you lost a couple of teeth."

"Never mind how I look, or what you see! Are those cigars?"

"Touchy, aren't you? Yes, those are cigars. Have one? Light?"



Caltrop took the proffered match. He puffed his cigar well alight, then took it from between his swelled lips and demanded sharply:

"How did you fix it?"

"Threw the fear of God into the three of them. It was easy with Bushong and the Mexican. The judge has 'em dead to rights, and they know it; but I had to argue with Tresawna. However, I flatter myself that I finally showed him the error of his ways. He's as frightened as the other two are."

"Flatter yourself is right," declared Caltrop, with a peculiar smile. "How about Piper and Kergow?"

"They're lying low, and mighty quiet. I wouldn't be surprised if they left the country of their own accord. I talked to them at length."

"Stony Flint can't leave the country yet. Have you talked to him?"

"I managed a short conversation. I found him rather irritable, but it was the irritability of weakness. We'll have no trouble with Flint. His only wish is to be let alone. Buff Warren certainly backed that fellah off the table. Still, I suppose it would have been simpler if Warren had finished him."

"It would have been simpler if he had finished Warren, damn him! If it hadn't been for him—" Caltrop left the sentence unfinished, and swore again. "Is it true Joe appointed him and that infernal Bill Holliday deputies?"

"Gospel," said Yandle. "We're all so pleased!"

"The sheriff must be crazy. Bet or no bet, he should have got out of it somehow. Appointing those two jiggers deputies, when they're friends of these nesters, is the biggest mistake Joe ever made in his life. Why, the nesters intend to plow the land, and that alone will turn every cowman against them!" Caltrop considered for a moment. "Suppose Tresawna doesn't try to escape?" he concluded nervously.

"He will, especially when a method is provided. That's where I'll demonstrate the superiority of mind over matter. I'll—"

"I don't want to hear it," Caltrop interrupted emphatically. "The less I know about that, the better."

"I thought you'd be interested," the lawyer said in an injured tone, for he loved an audience.

"I'm interested in the end, not the means. You're sure they'll try to escape?"

"Didn't I just say so? You're fidgety, Sam."

"You bet I'm fidgety! So would you be fidgety, if you were let in for putting up twenty-five thousand dollars for bail."

"You won't have to put it up. How many times must I tell you that I've arranged for it all?"

"I wish I could be sure they wouldn't talk after they get out!"

"You said you saw only Tresawna?" put in the lawyer quickly.

"So I did—so I did; but—"

"You've nothing to fear. Uncorroborated evidence of an accomplice, you know, as I've told you several times, doesn't hold in law. Although Tresawna's friends are ordinarily ready to swear that black is white, I believe that hereafter the scoundrels won't be so eager to bear false witness. Besides, those three boys will be hitting the high spots. They won't linger anywhere if they can help it, because jail breaking is a crime carrying a penalty of not less than five years' nor more than ten years' imprisonment, or a fine of five thousand dollars, or both. No, Mr. Caltrop, I think you need have no apprehension regarding Tresawna & Co.!"

Caltrop gnawed his nails, and would not be comforted.

"I swear I don't see how we got into all this mess."

"We?" repeated the lawyer austere. "We did not get into this mess, as you term it—you got into it yourself. If you had permitted me to manage the affair, I would have attended to all the details that appear to have been overlooked."

"Is that so? How about the little detail of your star witnesses lying drunk all day behind the judge's corral? How about that, huh? Overlooked it, didn't you?"

"As I told you this morning, I had every reason to believe that Bushong and Chavez were telling the truth. I am no more responsible for the error that landed them in jail than I am responsible for the error that landed you in your present pickle."

"You were out when I came to your office," Caltrop grumbled sulkily.

"I returned within two hours. You could have waited; but because you were in too much of a hurry to wait, you had to start the ball rolling yourself with what unfortunate results you know."

"That's right! Rub it in! As if I could have foreseen that Tresawna would bungle it by picking those five drunken sots to help him! Why didn't the fool come to me for orders, when he found out the condition they were in, instead of trying to run off the Fair cattle by himself? If he'd only had one other man with him, the two of them could have fixed that interfering fool of a Buff Warren. It's about time somebody put a crimp in his clock!"

"He has proved very troublesome."

"Troublesome isn't the word. He has upset the pot all over the fire; and now he's a deputy. Oh, lovely!"

"And our business still to do," slyly interjected the lawyer.

"Oh, damn your sneers, and you too, for a slimy attorney! By—"

"Stop right there, Caltrop!" snarled the lawyer. "I've taken all the abuse I'm going to take from anybody to-day. I had to pull my knife on Tresawna, but if I have to pull it on you I'll carve you deep. Do you want me to pull you out of the quicksand you've walked into with your eyes open?"

"Yes," Caltrop said sullenly.

"Then stop, look, and listen. Aren't there any of your men you can trust in a deal of this kind?"

Caltrop shook his head.

"Rum sounded them all. They've found out that the nester's blind, and that makes all the difference in the world to them—the sentimental idiots!"

"It takes all kinds of people to make up a world," said the lawyer sententiously. "A man has to work with the tools at hand. If I were you, I'd drop this business for a month or two. Let it simmer down. Then, later, we can work out some scheme for getting rid of the Fairs."

"Drop nothing!" exclaimed Caltrop. "I don't want—"

"Tell the neighbors, do! I imagine they'll all be interested."

"Well, I don't want to drop this thing," said Caltrop, lowering his voice. "I won't drop it. Nesters are worse than osage orange. Give them half a chance, and they'll spread all over the place. I want to get those devilish Fairs out of there before they take root. Don't you suppose everybody is watching to see how I take this thing? You bet they are. If I pass it over, I might as well go out of the cattle business."

"You exaggerate."

"No, I don't, either. I know what I'm doing."

"Do you? I wonder! As things stand now, it would have been better if you'd offered to buy them out, as I advised, after we discovered that the man was blind."

"Do you think I would waste a dime in that direction, after what's happened?"

"I suppose not," the lawyer said wearily. "I know how stubborn you are. I—"

Footsteps sounded in the short hall leading to the kitchen.

"Now what in—" began the lawyer.

The hall door opened, and Tex Piper and Mac Kergow pushed into the office. Yandle and Caltrop rose from their chairs with goatlike agility.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded the lawyer.

Tex Piper made a gesture with his right hand. The hand held a six-shooter.

"Gentlemen, be seated!"

The gentlemen obeyed. There seemed to be nothing else for them to do. While Tex closed and bolted the hall door, Mac Kergow, displaying a second weapon, advanced upon the lawyer and Caltrop and disarmed them with expert fingers.

Kergow gazed upon Yandle's dirk with frank disgust.

"I never did like a knife. Too Mexican for me! Sam, here, is a perfect lady, with his pearl-handled thirty-eight on a forty-five frame. Don't wiggle so much, Sam! You may have a gun under each arm, for all I know."

"Is this a holdup?" asked Caltrop, in a voice containing no trace of nervousness.

"Is this a holdup?" he repeated.

"No—oh, no!" denied Tex in shocked accents. "We saw you come in here, and Mac and I figured it would be a good opportunity for a little conversation. We knew your front door would be locked, Pencil, so we came in through the kitchen. Your cook had gone to the store—not that it would have made any difference. You raised that bail, Sam?"

"The bail is being attended to," the lawyer deftly inserted, before Caltrop could reply.

"I was asking Sam, Pencil. You shut up! How about it, Sam?"

"It—it is being attended to," was Caltrop's reply.

"He's lying," declared Mac Kergow.

"I think so, too," concurred his com-

rade. "Caltrop, you haven't any intention of raising that bail. You're going to let those fellows stay in jail!"

"And why not?" demanded Caltrop, stung to irritation. "It's all their own fault! If Bushong and Chavez and Flint and you two hadn't seen fit to get drunk and saddle the whole job on Tresawna, one-half of your outfit wouldn't be in jail!"

"Getting drunk is our own business, old-timer," said Piper. "There was no great rush about it. If anybody's to blame, it's Andy, but that's no reason why he should stay in jail any more than the other two."

"Loose talk, loose talk!" struck in the lawyer. "We're not getting anywhere. As bail for those three boys is all you want, and as you've been told it's being attended to, we will no longer detain you."

"There is a little more," said Piper. "We want five hundred apiece to leave the country."

"You won't get it!" exclaimed Caltrop.

"Leave this to me, Sam," said the lawyer sharply. "And I don't want to tell you again to lower that bull bellow of yours. You must remember that this town is inhabited. Tex, don't you think your demands are a trifle excessive?"

Piper wagged his bullet head.

"Not at all! If you think it would be cheaper to have me go to the judge, just say so."

"I imagine you won't risk the judge. You'd only get yourselves in jail. Besides, Piper, I know enough about you and Kergow this minute to set you to making bridles for life."

Piper looked a little startled. Kergow's heavy features did not move a muscle.

"Yes," continued the lawyer placidly. "Do you and Mac recall riding out of Farewell on the 15th of last November and returning on the 2nd of December? Would you like me to mention where you went?"

"Damn your soul!" blazed Piper in a fierce whisper. "If I thought you wouldn't keep your mouth shut, I'd settle you here and now!"

"If you were capable of thought," drawled the lawyer, staring calmly into the muzzle of Piper's six-shooter, "you would realize that what I know is written legibly on legal cap and folded neatly within an envelope, said envelope resting in my safe-deposit box in the First National of Piegan City. In the event of my death otherwise than by disease or old age, my executors

will open that envelope and—act accordingly. How many cards, Mr. Piper?"

"None," said Piper shortly, and put away his gun. "I quit!"

"Not yet," said the lawyer. "You'll play your hand out. I have a little work for you to do. I wish that you and Mac would—"

"But what do you know about them?" inquired Caltrop, when Piper and Kergow had taken their departure.

"Not a thing," replied Pencil Yandle.

"Huh? Then how—"

"You see, I merely happened to discover that they left town on the 15th of November and returned on the 2nd of December with enough money not only to pay their outstanding bills, but to lose about a thousand dollars apiece at poker. Knowing them, it was a comparatively easy matter to add two and two and total considerably more than four. You will find, Sam, that a strong bluff, assisted by the evil conscience of the bluffee, will work nine times out of ten."

"Then why didn't you work it sooner? You could have saved me the money you had to pay for their testimony."

The lawyer shook his head.

"I never play a trump card unless it's absolutely necessary; and don't harbor the notion that this card is to cost you nothing. I used it in order to have your little job of work completed to your satisfaction. You'll be charged my regular fee, old-timer!"

## XIX

"SEE Sam and his new beard this morning, Bill?" asked Buff, coming upon his cousin where he was restringing his saddle behind Lainey's Hotel.

"In town, huh?" grinned Bill Holliday, sinking a string into the wool lining with meticulous care. "Did he see you?"

"Not with both eyes. The left one is still closed."

"Just about a week, ain't it? Joe said he'd be in bed that long."

Buff nodded.

"Looks like he must have mighty important business, to come to town with those shiners for folks to see!"

"It's a wonder you wouldn't find out what his business is."

"I did—that is, I found out who he had business with. It was Pencil Yandle, the slippery juniper!"

"I wonder!" said Bill meaningly, reaching for a concho and threading the string through the slots. "I wonder!"

"I'm wondering, too. I'm betting it's the Fairs. He ain't worrying his head about those three young hopefuls in the calaboose."

"Not twenty-five thousand dollars' worth—that's a cinch."

Buff squatted down on his heels and began to roll a cigarette.

"Now there's an odd number," he said presently. "I just saw two pair of boots go by Yandle's back door."

"Huh?"

"Look yonder. There's Yandle's house, beyond that covered wagon. You can see the sill and part of the back door under the reach. Those two pair of boots came round the corner of the house and went into the kitchen."

"The soup is getting thicker!"

"Especially when one pair of boots belongs to Tex Piper."

"Those red ones, huh?"

"The only pair of that color in town. It's a safe bet Mac's legs are in the other pair. I think a little pepper in the soup would improve the flavor. Let's go sit in that patch of brush behind the corral—then we can see the whole of Yandle's back door."

For the space of half an hour they abode patiently in the patch of brush. Then came their reward in the shape of Tex Piper's hatless head stealthily poking out from the door. Evidently the deserted prospect pleased the man, for he appeared in full fig almost immediately, followed by Mac Kergow. The two hard cases filtered around the corner of the house and vanished streetward.

"I'd sure like to know what those two devils are up to now!" said Bill, getting to his feet.

"Whatever it is," returned Buff, following Bill's example, "I'm glad Kergow is in it. He's such a buffle-headed bull calf, it will make it easier to bust him."

They strolled back to where Holliday's saddle lay, and Bill resumed his labors. Buff departed, with the intention of circulating through the saloons and other places of business and keeping an eye on Piper and Kergow.

Buff stopped in the hotel kitchen for a handful of matches, and passed into the dining room on his way to the street. Then

he changed his course, lounged over to a window, and sat down on the sill; for Tex Piper and Mac Kergow were filing upstairs to the second story.

As he sat looking out into the street, he could hear them tramping about in their room. He heard the loud voice of Mac Kergow swearing over a shirt that had disappeared. He could not catch Tex Piper's remarks.

Then, suddenly, he heard Piper's voice plainly. The door of their room, shut after they entered, must have been quietly opened.

"It's a good thing we had 'em shod," Piper was saying. "The Bend road both sides of Cutter is almighty rocky."

It would seem, then, that the two adventurers were riding to Paradise Bend, a lively town some two hundred miles north of Farewell; but Buff understood that with such men it is always well to look deeper than the surface.

"I wish I had cantinas," said Kergow. "I can't get all my stuff in the saddle pockets."

"Tie what you got extra in your slicker, you jack," advised Piper. "That's plenty good enough till we get to the Bend. We ain't ridin' around the world."

There it was again—"the Bend." It was becoming increasingly evident that Mr. Piper wished the listener to know where he and his comrade were going. They had seen Buff seat himself on the window sill—he was sure of that.

Lainey, coming into the dining room at this juncture, cocked a listening ear.

"Looks like Tex and Mac were leaving. They ain't paid their bill yet, neither."

The fat man waddled upstairs. Buff decided to rejoin Bill at the corral. He thought it as well to be on hand when Piper and his friend caught up their horses—this in order to give the strangely communicative Piper every chance to spread himself.

Buff did not leave the window immediately, however, for Yandle had just come into view. The lawyer was crossing the street toward the sheriff's office. While Buff remained at gaze, he entered the office and closed the door.

When Tex Piper and Mac Kergow, carrying their packed saddles, blankets, and rifles, appeared at the corral, they found Buff leaning against the stockade and watching Bill stringing a saddle. Both men



gave the two deputies a civil good morning, and dropped their gear near the gate. While Kergow with his bridle went into the corral, Piper paused to roll a cigarette.

"I hope I never see this town again!" he remarked.

"As bad as that?" was Buff's comment.

"Worse! A man hasn't any chance here. The country's dead, and without capital in the cow business a man might as well be dead, too. Mac and I, we're dragging it to see what Paradise Bend looks like."

"In a business way?" was Buff's query.

"In a business way. What other way do you think?"

"I didn't know, and I was wondering. No offense, Tex!"

"Putting it that way, sure not," said Tex readily. "I wish you'd do me a favor, Buff. I'm expecting an important letter this month some time. I went to the post office to tell Calloway to forward it, and he was out, so I told his wife instead. Now you know how women folks are—they'd forget their heads if they weren't sewed on their necks right tight. I'd be obliged if you'd tell Calloway for me yourself, and then there sure won't be any mistake. It's a right important letter, or I wouldn't bother you."

"No bother, Tex. I'll do it. You want it care of anybody, or just the Bend?"

"Just the Bend, Buff."

Piper stooped for his bridle, and went into the corral to catch up his horse.

When the two men had led out, saddled, and gone on their way, Buff smiled without mirth.

"He couldn't let well enough alone!" he said.

"The letter business was using a shovel, all right," said Bill.

"Sounds like the sheriff coming," remarked Buff.

It was the sheriff.

"I wish, Buff," said Mack, when he had come within speaking distance, "that you and Bill would traipse over to the Sweetwater country and see is everything all right with my claims. I'm kind of wondering whether somebody's jumped 'em or not. You know where they lie—in a row on the south face of the mountain, under the quartzite pinnacle—don't you? Yeah, well, you better start now. Take my pack outfit. Get what you need from the Blue Pigeon, and I'll voucher it."

"Good enough!" said Buff.

The sheriff nodded and withdrew. Buff winked impishly at Bill.

"The soup is getting thicker and thicker!" he observed.

"Like the sheriff's head, if he expects to take anybody in with that yarn about folks wanting to jump his Sweetwater claims. Shucks, you couldn't give those worn-out prospects of his away with a pound of coffee!"

"I expect Yandle thinks any old tale to get us out of the way is good enough."

"Somehow it don't seem like Joe could take orders from slippery Pencil."

"Suggestions, not orders, Bill. Joe is a cowman. He'll do about anything he legally can to put the kibosh on nesters. Joe ain't actually crooked, you understand, but he's not asking any questions when it comes to what Sam or Yandle want done; and if he can discredit us in any way, he'll jump at the chance."

"He's taking things quiet enough."

"He's a good poker player, Joe is. He's been easy as an old shoe with us, and acts like he's making the best of losing his bet, but don't you think for a minute he ain't the cat at the rat hole. I know Joe from 'way back. Tell you, Bill, don't be in any hurry with those last two strings. We want to dawdle around like we would ordinarily on a no-account job like this. Even if the sheriff hadn't horned in on us, I wasn't intending to pull out under half an hour. I want to give Tex and Mac a good start."

"We don't want to give 'em too much of a start," said Bill.

"You leave it to your uncle. He knows what he's doing. I'll be back in a minute. I'm going over to the sheriff's, to borrow his field glasses."

"How about stocking up the grub, then, while you catch up the pack horse?"

"I'll get the grub after I get the glasses. We're both going to catch up the pack horse."

"Why the two of us?" grumbled Bill.

Buff wouldn't tell him why, and went off to get the field glasses and the food. The sheriff made no bones about lending the glasses. He seemed to think it a wise provision on Buff's part.

At the end of half an hour Buff returned to the corral with an armful of provisions, which he halved.

"Stick your half in your saddle pockets, Bill," he said.

"What's the pack horse for?" demanded the mystified Bill.

"For something else," was the unsatisfactory explanation. "I'll catch up your horse while you're finishing that last string."

Within ten minutes the cousins were in the saddle and trotting toward the sheriff's horse pasture. It being necessary for the sheriff to have his horses ready to hand, he could not allow his string to run out on the flats with those of other members of the community. Instead, he had put two hundred acres under fence.

The pasture gate was a few rods beyond the corral. As the deputies passed the corral, the sheriff's racer nickered in friendly fashion.

"Good old horse!" chuckled Bill.

"The sheriff's horses are sure a great help. The pack horse is, special."

"How is he, if we ain't going to pack him?"

"You'll see. That's him yonder in the swag. We'll drift him along toward the southeast corner."

They drove the pack horse unhurriedly, keeping out of sight in the swag until they came to a grove of trees. They crossed into the grove, and rode down into a wide draw leading in the desired direction. At the corner Buff dismounted, laid hands on a fence post, and pulled it out of the ground. Three more posts he served in similar fashion.

"Ain't it amazing what a horse will do to a fence when he wants to get out?" said Buff, when the posts and wires were flat on the ground. "You'd never believe he'd pull all these posts up, would you? Chouse him over, Bill!"

"I wonder will the sheriff believe it," said Bill, as he obliged.

"Not if we put the posts back," returned Buff.

He led his horse across the wires and proceeded, with the assistance of Bill, to set the posts upright.

"He won't come snooping around unless he gets suspicious," went on Buff, topping his mount. "He ain't suspicious yet, and by the time he is we'll be far, far away, trailing this valuable pack animal."

"Did you think all this up out of your own head, Buff?"

Buff nodded.

"Ain't he clever? So young, too! If you were a couple of horse thieves, like

Piper and Mac, which way would you go to the Fair place?"

"Those draws west of Indian Ridge."

"And that brings you out on the short-grass country between Soogan Creek and Long Coulee. You can watch 'most all that country from the hill northwest of Moccasin Spring. From the south side of the hill you can see the Fair place. What's fairer than that?"

"You think they're going to run the Fairs off?" said Bill, ignoring the atrocious pun.

"You just come to life? It's about time. Sure I think so! It's as plain as the long nose on your dish face."

"You leave my nose alone. We've lived together a good many years, and never had a cross word; but about Tex and Mac you may be right. You sometimes are."

"I am this time, anyway. They'll ride the short-grass country, you'll see."

"They may swing farther west—ride the other side of Soogan Creek. Then you won't be able to see 'em," said Bill, who felt it incumbent upon him to dash his cousin's cocksureness, if he could.

"Wring out that wet blanket, brother! Tex Piper ain't the man to ride two miles when he can get there just as safe and easy by riding one. Besides, Chuck Morgan, Mis' Dale, and Red Kane run their cattle west of Soogan. Either Chuck or Red, or both, are sure to be over there this time of year. Tex and Mac ain't going to run the risk of meeting anybody, are they? Well, then!"

Bill, discomfited, changed the subject.

"Who's that yonder?"

"That" was a rider topping a ridge a mile and a half to the east.

"Grullo horse, looks to be," said Buff.

"Tex was riding a brown and Mac a red sorrel. This fellow—"

"Ain't one of them, but he's heading for Fair's straighter than we are! When he's behind the hill, we'll ride over that way. I'm curious about anybody riding to the Fair place!"

Before changing their direction, thinking to play safe, they waited ten minutes after the stranger's disappearance behind the ridge. Then, picking up the hoofprints on the side of the ridge, they followed them over the top. By rights the horseman should have been still in sight. He wasn't; but the hoofprints of the horse were.

"Shod horse—all around," said Bill.

"The son of a gun!" exclaimed Buff. "See where he turned his horse around, soon as he was over the top, and watched us from behind that clump of buckbush!"

"Yeah, and look at his tracks here. He sure went off the hill a flying!"

Buff at once thought of the Twisted Foot. In tune with his plan to shield Gilian at all hazards, he had made not the slightest mention to Bill of his experience with the arch criminal.

"Guess we'll follow these tracks a ways," said Buff.

The tracks led them at a right angle to the former line of march.

"He's changed his mind about going to the Fair place," said Bill, after half an hour, "if he ever was going there."

"Looks that way. He's heading for the breaks west of the Bar S ranch house as fast as he can travel. We might as well go on back. No use running our horses down for nothing."

Bill turned his horse.

"Wonder who he is!"

"Some old boy on the dodge," said Buff, in a tone considerably more careless than his thoughts.

The fleeing man might not be the Twisted Foot. Still—

They reached the hill northwest of Moccasin Spring without seeing any one. On the flat top of the hill they staked out their horses and hobbled the pack horse. In the long grass at the edge of the hill they themselves lay down to watch the back trail.

After a time, Bill, growing tired of watching, rolled over on his back, pulled his hat over his face, and went to sleep. Buff did not doze. Either with the field glasses or without, he never ceased to watch the short-grass country.

As the hours dragged on, he was forced to spur his belief that the two men would eventually come into sight. For what other purpose had they gone to the meeting with Caltrop and Yandle? Their furtive manner of leaving the house, their actions at the corral, what Piper had said, all pointed to one thing—some devilry against the Fairs. Besides, he knew Caltrop—knew the stubborn nature that would have its desires, come hell or high water.

But suppose Tex and his friend were traveling another route, as Bill had suggested! Suppose they were already at the Fair place, engaged in God knew what! The hair bristled on the back of Buff's

neck. He half rose. Piper and Kergow were capable of anything—all Farewell knew that.

As he thought of these things, Buff saw Gilian's face. He resolved to leave at once, and to free his jumping mind of these uncertainties. He turned to rouse Bill, but Bill was awake and watching him.

"Discouraged, huh?" said Bill, with startling insight. "I told you they'd ride west of Soogan!"

"They're late," admitted Buff.

"Two to one they ain't thinking of going to the Fairs," pursued Bill, seizing his advantage. "You want to tighten the curb strap on your imagination, Buff. Bad business letting it run away with you!"

"Is that so?" said Buff, lying down again for a last look. "Is—that—so?"

A moment later he handed the glasses to Bill.

"Have a look. See what you make of what's by the little old hill over yonder."

Bill slowly turned the eyepieces to the correct focus.

"It's them," he conceded. "Leastways, it's their colored horses; but you never can tell. Maybe it's Red Kane and Chuck Morgan."

"Maybe it's *Jack Spratt* and the man in the moon," Buff remarked with contempt. "Here's where we drift!"

"Bushwhack 'em?"

"That wouldn't be legal. We're deputies, and have to do everything according to law, Bill."

"Oh, I didn't mean kill 'em plumb dead," was Bill's naïve explanation. "Just smoke 'em up some."

"And have the job to do all over again later? Have sense, William. I want to arrest 'em."

"But they ain't done anything yet."

"They will."

"I believe in shooting first. This business of holding off till the other fellow ventilates you plenty is too rich for my blood!"

"It won't come to that."

"You don't know," asserted Bill, with gloom. "You'll be getting us killed with your finickiness. You needn't jabber about being legal, either. Be as legal as you please, but I ain't taking a chance on those two reptiles!"

"And make it harder for the Fairs?" Buff struck in swiftly, coiling his rope.

Bill tossed up despairing hands.

"I surrender! Have it your own way;

but I swear, if you get me erased in this fracas, I'll haunt you!"

## XX

THEY approached the Fair place from the east, so that Tex and Mac might not be so likely to cut their track and grow wary. As they rode, they cut the track of another horse coming from the east—a shod horse traveling at a sharp trot.

"These tracks ain't a half hour old," said Bill.

Buff nodded.

"They're about the size of that grullo's."

"Sure must have hit a wicket to get here ahead of us!"

"Maybe he had reason."

"If he's at the Fairs', we'll find out who he is," said Bill. "You go this way, and I'll ride round and come in from the river side."

"No!" vetoed Buff, in a panic. "We'll stay together."

He wanted to catch the Twisted Foot, but not at the Fair place—anywhere but there!

Bill glanced curiously at Buff. What was the matter with Buff? Why didn't he want to do what was obviously essential in order to discover the identity of the grullo's rider? It couldn't be that Buff was afraid to go in alone. Bill knew his relative better than that. What was it, then?

They rode on in silence. Rising a low swell, they saw, a mile and a half away, the light green foliage and silvery trunks of the cottonwoods lining the banks of the Lazy, and, through gaps, the cool sheen of the river itself. They could not see the Fair buildings, because of a knoll lying directly in their path. The tracks of the shod horse led straight toward this knoll.

They followed the trail up the side of the knoll. When they topped it, they could see the gray-brown log-and-shake shacks and pole stockade that were the Fair stables and corral, roosting on the eastern end of a short ridge, under whose western shoulder lay the long log house.

"He's going there, all right," muttered Buff miserably.

If the man were the Twisted Foot, he would have to take him—he would have to, no matter what the consequences to the Fairs.

"Wonder what Fair put a flagpole on his stable for!" said Bill, shading his eyes with his hand.

Buff had been more absorbed in the horse tracks, and what they portended, than in paying attention to any improvements on the stables; but now he stared. It looked like a very thick flagpole stuck up there on the roof of the nearest stable. There was a puffiness about it that did not coincide with his idea of what a flagpole should be.

Suddenly the pole moved across the roof and sank quickly from sight. A moment later they saw it twinkling along the ridge toward the house.

"There's your flagpole, Bill!"

"Going to warn the fellow on the grullo," grumbled Bill. "I tell you flat, Buff, I'm beginning to be suspicious of these Fairs!"

Buff made no comment. Under the circumstances, there was none that he could make.

"What did I tell you?" Bill exclaimed in triumph, less than a minute later, as a man riding a grullo flashed into sight for an instant between the ranch house and the cottonwoods. "These Fairs are a fine bunch! For all you know, they may have rustled every head they own."

"You're jumping at conclusions," was Buff's weak parry.

"When a conclusion hits me bang in the eye, I don't need to jump at it. You don't act like you wanted to see anything wrong, Buff."

"I've got to be sure first," defended Buff. "The fellow on a grullo may be just in a hurry to get somewhere."

"You think so, huh? Go to the head of the class! What a bright child our Buff is! You make me sick! I tell you there's something wrong about these Fairs. Bet you ten they'll say nobody has been here—least of all anybody with a grullo!"

"It's a bet," replied Buff, although he knew as well as he knew his own name that Bill would win.

"And you can ask 'em yourself," Bill added.

"I will," agreed Buff.

Gilian met them at the door of the ranch house. She gave Buff greeting calmly. He introduced her to Bill Holliday. The latter reddened, in memory of the incident at the Eighty-Eight. Gilian acknowledged the introduction as if she had never seen him before.

"Anybody been here lately, Miss Fair?" inquired Buff, his eyes on hers.

"No," said she, giving him look for look,



as if she was the most truthful person in the world.

To Buff, who had already discounted Gilian's denial of the coming and going of the man on the grullo, the actual utterance of the lie was no shock. The poor girl had to lie. That the man whose visit she denied was the Twisted Foot was now as certain as it was terrible. There were discrepancies in the grounds for this belief, of course; but—there you are. That little word of three letters has lynched more men than all the hard-working hangmen have hung since time began.

"We're looking for a couple of fellows," said Buff slowly, "and—howdy, Mis' Fair? Shake hands with my cousin here, Bill Holliday. We both got deputies' jobs now. I was just asking your daughter if anybody had been here lately."

He did not miss the look of fear that came into the eyes of the two women at the word "deputies." Both men were wearing their stars under their vests.

"Why, no," was Mrs. Fair's reply. "Nobody has been here since you left—not a soul. Jemima, you don't remember anybody coming here since Mr. Warren went away, do you?"

"No," came in Jemima's clear young voice, "I don't. Hello, Buff! I'll be out in a minute. I'm building a deep dish pie right now, and I can't leave it. If mother doesn't ask you to step in for a bite pretty soon, I will."

"The invitation was on the tip of my tongue," said Mrs. Fair, with her pleasant smile. "If you'll unsaddle, supper will be ready very soon."

"We wouldn't care for any just now, thanks," said Buff.

He did not miss the deepening shadow in the eyes of both women.

"Oh, you must stop!" Mrs. Fair urged hastily.

"You'll travel all the better for a meal," added Gilian.

"We're going to stop, all right. I only meant we won't have time to eat," Buff told her.

He noted that the eyes of both women brightened at once. He went on to explain, without mentioning any names, his purpose in coming.

"This is very good of you," Mrs. Fair said, when he had done. "It seems that you make us more indebted to you every day. What are you going to do?"

"Put our three horses in the stable. I'll hide out in the open shed next to it, where I can watch three sides of the ridge. Bill will find him a good thick place in the cottonwoods along the river bank. It will make it a lot easier for us if you people will stay in the house. If you hear any shooting, don't be scared—just lie down on the floor."

"What did I tell you?" began Bill with a savage sneer, when they were alone.

"That girl—"

"Don't say it, Bill!" interrupted Buff.

"I'm going to marry that girl some day."

Bill gazed at him.

"You mean it?"

"I sure do!"

"Well, all I got to say, it's your funeral. Another good man gone! Shucks, Buff, I thought you were just fooling. I never took you serious. You ain't the marrying kind."

"I will be," said Buff briefly, thonging his holster to his leg.

"Lemme tell you something, young fellow," protested his relative. "You got the wrong idea. You don't need a wife. You need a long term in the insane asylum!"

"Aw, shut up!"

"I'm tryin' to save your life, you jack! That girl—Buff, she's fine-looking, and nice as pie, too, I'll bet—*now*; but marry her, and what happens? It 'll be 'Buffy this' and 'Buffy that,' till you can't rest. She'll haze you around. She'll want the wood chopped a month ahead. She won't let you touch a card. She'll make you take off your boots in the house, and wear slippers. She'll stop your smoking. You'll have to go outdoors to spit. You won't dare take a drink, or even cuss. She—she"—his tone sank to a horrified whisper—"she'll give you *religion*!"

"Won't that be great?" exclaimed Buff. "Then we'll come around and convert you, Billyum!"

"Like hell!" snarled the unregenerate William. "You'll stay away from me—that's what you'll do! If you're so dead set on making a fool of yourself, I won't argue with you any more; but I'm here to say I don't understand it, and you'll regret it, and so'll she. Me personal, if I was a girl, I wouldn't marry you on a bet—no, sir! Oh, all right, all right! I said I wouldn't argue with you any more, didn't I? What you yowlin' about?"

Throughout the rest of the day Buff waited and watched in the shed. No one came near him. He had given orders against that. The sun beat down on the shed and made it an oven. Buff, perspiring, unbuttoned his shirt, and alleviated his comfortless condition with many cigarettes.

Of the men whom he expected he saw not a sign—until the sun had set. Then, in the dusk, a shadow detached itself from the shadows of trees and what not at the foot of the ridge, and crept up the slope toward the sheds and stables.

Buff, knowing how in partial darkness even a sunburned skin gathers light, smeared his features with a light coating of black grease from one of the hubs of the wagon beside which he was crouching. Being a thorough person, he treated even his hands in similar fashion. All the while he watched, through a crack, the shadow slipping up the rise toward his shed.

At twenty yards Buff knew that the shadow was Tex Piper. He seemed to be carrying a six-shooter in one hand and a can in the other. A can! Why a can?

As Tex came closer, the crack no longer served its purpose. Buff crawled noiselessly toward the rectangle of grayness that was the front of the shed. Within arm's length of the open air he rose to his feet, and, using infinite caution, flattened himself into the angle between the wall of the stable and a twelve-inch log serving as a roof prop. Here he stood, straining his ears, scarcely breathing, his drawn six-shooter in his hand.

For a while he heard no sound. No doubt Tex was likewise waiting and listening. Then the padlock on the hasp of the stable door clinked faintly. Buff blessed the forethought that had caused him to obviate all risk of arousing the suspicious natures of the two worthies by a discovery of official horses where official horses should not be.

A rustling—feet stepping softly. Tex was coming toward the shed. A dark bulk against the grayness. Tex was standing in the open front of the shed—standing and looking toward the other end of the ridge, behind which lay the house. Buff could have stretched out an arm and touched the intruder, or batted the fellow over the head with the barrel of his six-shooter, if he had wished.

But he did not wish—yet. Standing under a shed in a listening attitude is not

an action for which one may convict a man. It was necessary to let Tex go, not too far, but far enough to enable an officer of the law to put him where the wicked cease from troubling and the jailer is a pest.

Tex turned and looked into the shed. It seemed to Buff that he must be seen. Tex, peering, had looked straight at him. The deputy held his breath, and his fingers stiffened on the butt of his six-shooter.

Then Tex stepped noiselessly past him into the shed, and vanished in the darkness of the interior. Buff heard him feeling his way along behind the wagon. There was silence for a spell. Then came scraping sounds, and the rank smell of kerosene.

This was what the can had signified! Although Buff had counted on fire as one of the methods that would probably be employed to get rid of the Fairs, he had not counted on such a medium as kerosene. He cursed himself for a blind fool not to have stayed at the back of the shed. The point where he stood was too far from the base of operations; but he did not dare to move. The slightest sound on his part would spoil everything.

He braced himself for the striking of the match. Then would be his opportunity, for the incendiary would be temporarily blinded by the flare so close to his face, while Buff, being farther away, would not be so affected.

Tex made a little sound in setting down the can. He would light the match now, Buff thought; but he did not. He stood quite still. What was he waiting for?

What was Kergow doing? At any rate, he could not come to the house without being seen by Bill. There was sound, solid comfort in that thought.

Suddenly a shot sounded from the flat beyond the river—then another, and another—five in all, apparently from a six-shooter. Then came a louder crack, followed by a ripple of shots. These were from a Winchester. Only by a supreme effort of will was Buff enabled to hold himself against the wall. He could hear a confusion of cries from the direction of the house, but he did not budge. What was happening on the flat was Bill's business; his own work lay with Tex.

Still there was no sound from Tex. Within the shed there was the silence of the grave. It might well be a grave before the job was finished!

The shooting on the flat continued. Another rifle chimed in—Bill's rifle. Buff recognized the heavy bark of the forty-five-ninety cartridge. The other man was using a gun of smaller caliber.

Scra-a-tch! Tex's match flashed alight on the tire of the wagon wheel. Buff leaped at him and struck—struck short. A six-shooter spat flame in his face. Burning powder grains stung his cheek. A knee struck him heavily in the thigh.

He grabbed the wrist of Tex's gun hand, twisted it upward, and tried to backheel and run over his adversary. In this he was only partly successful. The two men, leg-locked and arm-locked—for Tex had seized Buff's right wrist even as his own had been seized—toppled sidewise against the wagon, whose bed was now finely ablaze.

"You damned nigger!" grunted Tex.

Buff, if the moment had not been so serious, would have laughed. As it was, he had much ado to keep Tex from swinging him sidewise into the flames, which were licking over the sideboards. The balked Tex snapped at Buff like a dog. Buff smacked Tex on cheek and chin with his forehead, thereby causing the other man to bite his own cheek.

Mouthing a curse, Tex strove by a sudden jerk to break Buff's hold and spring away, but Buff stayed with him, and found opportunity to give him the knee. For an instant Tex weakened, and his weakness endured long enough for Buff to roll him backward over his hip and jam him into the flames of the burning wagon.

With a yelp of mingled pain and dismay, Tex let go Buff's right wrist. Buff swung his six-shooter in a twinkling arc, and struck Tex under the left ear. The man collapsed in a heap.

His clothing was beginning to burn. Buff smothered the incipient blaze by rolling him in the dirt. Then he dragged the senseless man out of the shed, dumped him at one side, and jumped to the tongue of the burning wagon.

He ran the wagon out of the building, and sprang back within, to extinguish the fire, which had now spread to the wall and was licking up at the roof. With handfuls of dirt and a gunny sack he smothered and beat out the crawling flames, and within five minutes the fire in the shed was out.

Buff went outside, and turned his attention to the blazing wagon. This was a different proposition, however, for the vehicle

was well alight from the end gate to the seat, and the heat was so great that he could not approach within ten feet.

"They needed that wagon, too," he said to himself.

An idea struck him. He knelt beside the unconscious Tex, and proceeded to search him. In one pocket was a heavy leather poke. This he dropped into the inside pocket of his own vest. In another pocket he discovered a handful of silver. This joined the poke. A pocket knife and a few personal odds and ends he returned intact.

He was on his feet, and swabbing the grease from his face with a handkerchief, when Gilian, followed by Jemima and all the rest of the family except Mr. Fair, panted into the circle of firelight. Not till then did it occur to Buff that the firing out on the flat had ceased.

## XXI

"I was sitting there in the willows on this side of the river," said Bill, "when I heard the first shot out on the flat, where the cattle are. I got across as quick as I could, and began firing at the flashes of the fellow's gun."

"Did you hit him?" asked Gilian.

"I don't know, ma'am. He went away. He got two heifers before he went, though."

"Two heifers!" cried Mrs. Fair, aghast.

"Yes, ma'am, but they ain't a total loss," said the capable Bill. "I got to 'em and cut their throats before they died on you complete. They bled fine. If you'll lend us a lantern, Buff and I'll butcher 'em for you, so you'll have the meat and hides, anyway."

"And if you don't want all the meat, Mis' Fair," said Buff, "we'll pack it in town for you and sell it to Bill Lainey or the Canton. They're always on the lookout for beef. They'll pay six or seven cents a pound."

"You're very kind," said Mrs. Fair faintly. She had never ceased to be astonished by the Western ability to turn an apparent mishap to good purpose. "We don't want to bother you too much. We—"

"Don't say a word, ma'am," interrupted Buff. "It's no trouble for us at all. You leave it to Bill and me. If you'll get us that lantern while we're handcuffing Tex Piper to this post, we'll be obliged. We better borrow your other wagon, too. Two heifers makes quite a lot of beef."

"He's comin' to, Buff," said Bill.

Buff nodded.

"About time!"

Tex rolled to one side and tried to sit up. The chain of the handcuffs around the post jerked him down. He swore with pain.

"It 'll all come back to you in a minute," said Buff.

Tex squinted at the two dark forms revealed by the light of the lantern set on the ground near his feet. He swore again—in surprise, this time.

"I thought you were going to Paradise Bend," said Buff gently; "and I guess you thought we were going to the Sweetwater country, didn't you?"

Tex Piper was understood to damn everybody.

"I expect so," assented Buff. "It's a wicked world. Ain't it amazing what bad luck Mr. Yandle has had with his handy little helpers lately? Here's Chavez and George Bushong in jail already, and here's you, Mr. Piper, all set for a nice long term, too!"

"You're a liar!" snarled Piper. "I'll be out in a week!"

Buff shook his head.

"I doubt it. You know what the law is about arson, Tex. Setting fire in the night time to any barn, stall, outhouse, or other building situated within one hundred yards of any dwelling house is punished by imprisonment in the county jail or Territorial prison for not more than fifteen years, nor less than ten."

"You'll never convict me!" grunted Piper.

"The jury will do that. You might get an easier sentence, Tex, if you'd favor us with a few well chosen remarks. Who tempted you to take your match in hand?"

"You go to hell!"

"Well, all right, if you feel that way about it. Too bad you aren't Kergow! He wouldn't have such tender scruples. Here, I'll unlock you. You'll be more comfortable sitting up straight."

But unlocking the handcuffs did not render Piper at all comfortable. He sat up, it is true, but immediately fell to searching his pockets with frantic haste.

"Looking for the makings?" suggested Buff. "Here—take mine."

"Damn the makings!" yapped Piper distractedly. "My money's gone—all of it! You took it, one of you!"

"You think so? Well, you may be right; but what of it? You won't need money where you're going. Board, lodging, medicine, and even your—er—burial will be paid for by the Territory. I can't see what you got to complain of. Can you, Bill?"

"I should say not!"

But Tex would not be comforted.

"I want my money!" he insisted. "You ain't got any right to rob me this way!"

"Rob you? Shucks, Tex, you don't mean those harsh words! That money, two hundred and sixty-eight dollars, is what you're giving the Fairs to make up for the damage you did. They'll need a new wagon. There were two sets of harness and some odds and ends in the wagon, and they got burned up, too. Naturally you'll want to make good. I told Mrs. Fair that when I gave her the money."

"If you don't give me that money I'll put you in the pen! We'll see if the law allows you to rob a prisoner! By Gawd, you get that money back for me instanter!"

"You sure you want it, Tex?"

"You bet I do, and I'm going to have it, too!"

"I suppose I got to get it for you, then," Buff said, with a heavy sigh. "I don't want to be put in the pen; but all the same I'm kind of sorry for you, Tex. Those five extra years are a heap likely to be slow and gloomersome!"

"Huh?" Thus the startled Tex.

"But you'll maybe be used to it by that time. They say the first ten are always the hardest."

"What do you mean by those five extra years?" worried Tex.

"Oh, nothing, nothing! Don't bother your head about 'em. I can stand it if you can."

"Look here, I want to know what you mean, damn it all! Why will I get those five extra years?"

"Well, you see, Tex," Buff said apologetically, "resisting an officer is two years in the pen, and for a prisoner to try to escape is three years more."

"I only wrestled you around when you hopped on me," Tex pointed out.

"I'm not talking about that. A fellow's allowed to fight before he's taken prisoner. Leastways, I don't know anything different; but what I mean is *now*, after you're a prisoner and all. Then you haven't any right to fight and try to escape, see?"



"But I ain't fightin', and I ain't tryin' to escape!" was Tex Piper's bewildered exclamation.

"Yes, you are, too," contradicted Buff wearily. "You're clawing at Bill and me something ferocious. We're having a hard time with you. It's all we can do to hold you. There now! You've knocked Bill down."

"Why me?" demanded Bill.

"You've knocked Bill down twice," continued Buff, regardless of the interruption. "You're running down the hill fast as you can leg it. Look, yonder, Tex! You can almost see yourself, can't you? And see me—I'm right behind you. I catch you down by the river and fetch you back. No harm done, except to Bill, who will limp into court to-morrow most pitiful, and swear to the story I'll tell the judge, who'll give you five years more on the strength of it. Of course you won't mind a little thing like that. You'll have your two hundred sixty-eight dollars to comfort you."

"But that will be perjury!" wailed the horrified Tex.

"Yes, indeed, but how you going to prove it?"

"It's illegal!"

"Perjury usually is; but we'll be doing it for your sake, Tex, and that 'll take the curse off."

Tex glared at Buff in a dumb rage. Buff smiled upon him—the kind of a smile you bestow upon an interesting monkey in a cage. Tex started to speak, then gulped instead.

"Might as well slam the door, Tex," said Buff. "The tooth has got to come out some time."

"All right!" groaned Tex, who felt as if he were losing not one tooth, but many. "She—they can have the money."

Buff bowed his acknowledgment.

"God bless you, Tex Piper, and make you a better boy!"

## XXII

"WHY, of course everything is all right, Sam," encouraged Yandle, leaning back in his desk chair and locking hands over his well filled stomach. "Tex and Mac will be in pretty soon to report the job completed to your satisfaction."

"They should have been back before this," worried Caltrop; "early this morning, anyway."

"I expect they were delayed."

"Maybe Buff and Bill—"

"Rats! Those two jacks are over in the Sweetwater country."

"I know you told me they were going, all right, but—"

"Oh, go home and sit by the fire! A man as nervous as you are hasn't any right to wear pants."

"It's all very well for you to be cheerful. You've got nothing to lose; but I tell you I know this Buff Warren, and he's bad medicine."

"That may be, but he isn't clever. I am. I flatter myself that I'm a match for a dozen ignorant punchers!"

"You're always flattering yourself."

"What you need is cheering up. We'll have a little drink and go over and see the sheriff."

"I see they didn't take your pack, sheriff," remarked Yandle, eying the outfit piled in a corner of the office.

"And that's a funny thing, too," said the sheriff. "They took the horse."

"I knew it!" broke in Caltrop. "Something's up!"

"You needn't tell me," the sheriff intervened hastily. "What I don't officially know—"

"Won't hurt your conscience," Yandle sneered. "You needn't tell us, either. We all know that conscience."

"Meaning?" the sheriff frowned.

"That we're all little thieves together. You can't throw any bluff with me, Joe. Don't try it!"

Joe considered.

"You're a poisonous reptile, Pencil!" he remarked. "I often wonder why I don't squash you out of hand!"

"Because you need me—that's why. Because I'm the only man with a brain in the whole town. Who else but the brilliant legal light, Mr. Attorney Yandle, could have planned this absolutely safe scheme for getting rid of these undesirable nesters at McFluke's? The sheriff, of course, is conscientiously incapable of formulating any plan savoring of illegality. We will not expect any comment from him. Mr. Caltrop, did you speak? You didn't? I thought you wouldn't. Phut-t! You two whited sepulchers make me sick! I do certainly like a man to have the courage of his convictions."

At this the sheriff smiled wryly. He had been looking out of the window.

"You want to take care of that courage, Pencil. You'll need every ounce of it soon and sudden."

"Why?" demanded Yandle.

"Look out the window."

The lawyer walked to the window. Caltrop was there as soon as he was. Even Yandle paled at the sight they saw.

Up the street came three horsemen, riding abreast. Tex Piper, his head bandaged, handcuffs on his wrists, rode the sheriff's pack horse, bareback, between the two deputies, Buff Warren and Bill Holliday.

It was Caltrop who struck the first blow, but it was the lawyer who, having neglected to wear his knife that morning, secured a wrestling hold and brought the combat to the floor in a scrambling rough and tumble.

The sheriff watched the broil with pleased eyes.

"For once, anyhow," he said aloud, "Pencil Yandle won't be able to say that Sam Caltrop didn't have the courage of his convictions!"

Sixty seconds later the sheriff regretfully wrenched the victorious ranchman from his seat astride the prostrate lawyer.

"Here! Let Pencil up!" he cried in Sam's furious ear. "Buff's bringing his prisoner in here! Get a holt of yourselves, and settle it later!"

The sheriff stood the vanquished lawyer upright.

"Help me dust him off, Sam. Quick! Bleed in your handkerchief, Pencil, not on the chair. There—that's better. Wipe your face, Sam. Sit down, both of you. Look like nothing was the matter."

The office door swung open.

"Go on in, Tex," said Buff. "Morning, gentlemen!" he added, sweeping the occupants of the room with a keen glance. "What's the matter, Pencil? You look the worse for wear."

"Nosebleed," replied the lawyer through his handkerchief.

"That's sure tough! You want to—"

"Got a prisoner, Buff?" struck in the sheriff, in brisk, businesslike tones. "Picked him up over in the Sweetwater, I suppose. I kind of thought those claims needed attention."

"We haven't been to the Sweetwater yet," replied Buff placidly. "Bill and I've been trailing your old pack horse ever since yesterday morning."

"I—er—I see," murmured the sheriff. "Wasn't the horse in the pasture?"

"He got out," explained Buff. "We just naturally followed him, and he sure led us a chase away over to McFluke's old place, where the Fair family located."

Sam Caltrop moved slightly in his chair. He looked up into the sardonic eyes of Buff Warren. The latter grinned, and tipped him an understanding wink.

Bill Holliday had sidled across the room, and now leaned against the wall at the ranchman's elbow. Sam, his nervous fingers twitching at his new beard, shifted his position slightly.

"Tex, he took the horse, I suppose," said the sheriff.

"Not exactly," Buff told him. "Tex comes in later. You see, we got into the Fair place kind of late, so we stayed there all night, and during the evening I ran across Tex setting fire to one of the sheds. He didn't do much damage to the shed, but a wagon and two sets of harness were burned up."

"Buff, he took—" Tex began snarling.

"How's your leg, Bill?" interrupted Buff. "Feel any better?"

"Not much," replied Bill. "Hurts pretty bad."

"Go on, Tex!" prompted Buff. "What were you starting to say?"

"Nothing," grunted Tex.

"Fair enough! As I was saying, Tex did his part all right—"

"I got to be going," mumbled Yandle, and started for the door.

"Wait! I ain't through yet." Buff headed him off, and casually leaned back against the door. "Better take a seat, Pencil."

"I'd like to know what right—" began the lawyer.

"No right," said Buff. "You're foot loose and fancy free—er—so far. Still, I'd sit down, if I were you."

The lawyer peered at Buff over his red-dening handkerchief. How much did the infernal fellow know? The deputy's eyes told him nothing of value. Yandle turned and resumed his seat. Caltrop wiped a clammy brow.

"I was going on to say," continued Buff, "that while Tex was firing the shed, some friend of his out on the flat began shooting the Fair cattle."

He paused. The sheriff fidgeted. Buff began to roll a cigarette.

The sheriff coughed. He could endure the suspense no longer.

"Well, did you get the other fellow?" he inquired.

"Not that I know of," said Buff. "Bill, he shot at him and drove him off mighty prompt. It was sure Kergow's lucky day!"

"Kergow!" burst from the lawyer.

Buff nodded.

"Mac Kergow. Didn't you know?"

"Now how in hell should I know who the other fellow was?" testily demanded the lawyer.

"No offense! My mistake! We'll let it go—for now. Yeah, well, this Kergow, although it might not have been Kergow—for all I know it might have been you, Mr. Yandle, or Sam, there."

"Are you accusing me of shooting anybody's cattle?" cried Sam Caltrop.

He did not reach for his gun. As if by chance, Bill Holliday's hand had fallen on his shoulder.

"It's a serious thing, Buff, to accuse anybody of such a crime," the sheriff pointed out severely.

"Oh, I ain't accusing Sam of anything," declared Buff. "I said it might have been either him or Pencil, and so it might. I leave it to you, Joe. Man to man, now, mightn't it?"

"I don't know a thing about it," snapped the sheriff.

"Who's accusing you?" inquired Buff.

Joe chose to ignore the question. He turned and fumbled in the drawer of his desk. Buff's right hand closed on the butt of his six-shooter. He was not quite sure what was coming next; but the sheriff merely held out to him an entirely innocuous bunch of keys.

"Here!" said he. "Might as well lock him up. Judge Dolan went off fishing for a week, so the hearing won't be till after he gets back."

Buff took the keys.

"I was just wondering if you and these other two gentlemen wouldn't like to buy a little fresh beef."

The three gentlemen shook heads in unison. They looked puzzled. It was the sheriff who angled for the answer.

"How you mean, fresh beef?"

"I started to tell you a while back that Mac Kergow shot two of Mr. Fair's heifers. We butchered the heifers and loaded a wagon with beef—three fore quarters and four hind. The family took one fore for themselves. Miss Fair, she drove the

wagon in town with us, and it's down in front of the hotel now. Of course, I thought of the hotel and the restaurant right off, and then it came to me that maybe my friends might like some. I thought of you, Joe, and Pencil. It's real luck finding Sam here, too. How many quarters will you take, Sam?"

"Me with cows of my own! You're crazy!"

"Maybe so. Lemme see, you have a family, Sam, so I guess you'll want about three quarters. Those heifers were long two-year-olds, and dressed about four hundred pounds apiece. That 'll be three hundred pounds for you, Sam. Joe and Pencil can have the other four between them."

"Thanks," said the sheriff dryly. "I wouldn't care for any."

"Think it over, Joe," advised Buff. "Pencil is going to take his two, ain't you, Pencil? It—will—help—make—things—easier—for—everybody."

The latter sentence was delivered with a significant pause between each word.

"I'll be damned if—" began the lawyer.

"If you would instruct me on a point of law, Pencil," interrupted Buff, "I'd be grateful. What is the usual penalty inflicted on an accessory to the crime of arson in the nighttime?"

"I don't remember," replied Yandle. "I was on the point of saying that I'd be glad to take two quarters of beef. The usual price, I presume?"

"Not quite. It's such good beef, and we had such a savage time butchering by the light of a lantern, that I think twenty cents a pound would be about right."

"What?" screeched Yandle, fairly startled out of his self-control. "What? Twenty cents, when I can buy all I want for six and eight cents?"

"It ain't only the beef, Mr. Yandle. You're paying for our—er—time. I'll trouble you for forty dollars, Mr. Yandle. Cash—no checks!"

Yandle gulped. He loved his forty dollars as he did his right eye.

"All right," he said in choking tones, and began to dig into a trouser pocket. "I'll pay."

"Will a check do for me, Buff?" asked Sam Caltrop, in accents that were meek and mild, for him.

"Joe will lend you the money, if you're short," said Buff. "Won't you, Joe?"

Joe was on the point of refusing indig-

nantly, but Tex Piper's handcuffs tinkled at the moment, and he reconsidered. His skirts were practically clear, but—

"I'll give you a hundred, Buff, for Sam and me. You might tell the young lady to drive around."

"Thanks—I will."

It was at this juncture that Tex Piper began laughing like a hyena.

Buff, jingling with money, had departed to lock up his prisoner. For a space there was silence in the sheriff's office. Yandle made the first move. He arose and started for the door. The sheriff made the next move. Yandle halted. He did not like the looks of the six-shooter that had appeared in the sheriff's hand.

"What's that for?" he demanded.

"That is to extract one hundred dollars from you before you leave, Pencil!"

"Are you threatening me?"

"Why, no—I'm telling you."

"And what, may I ask, is the reason that you have suddenly turned holdup?"

"Your damned foolishness. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have had to pay Buff Warren a hundred dollars. You don't think for a minute I'd have handed it over so quickly if I hadn't known I could get it out of you, do you?"

"You won't get it—that's flat."

"Is that so? In that case, Mr. Yandle, I shall have the unpleasant duty of sending you to Piegana City to make hair bridles for ten years! You see, Nap Tobias and I have been spending a good deal of time in that empty cell between Tresawna's and that of George Bushong and the Mexican. The three men are pretty free talkers when they think nobody's around. They never suspected we were there for a minute, and we took down several pages of what they had to say. It makes mighty interesting reading, Yandle. How about that hundred dollars?"

"You're a damned scoundrel!" snarled Yandle.

"Only in a small way," said the sheriff modestly. "Dig!"

Yandle dug.

"Another thing, Yandle," resumed the sheriff, when he had counted the money and tucked it away. "The arrangement we talked over the other day for the escape of Tresawna, Bushong, and Chavez is off."

Sam Caltrop came alive with a jump.

"Off? What do you mean?"

"You're interested in this thing, too, are you?" said the sheriff, regarding Sam with a quizzical eye. "Of course, I never guessed that. Pencil was so careful not to mention your name! Very tender of your reputation, Pencil is—always."

"Cut that out!" rasped Sam. "Oh, shut up, Pencil! Joe knows. He's no fool. Joe, you don't mean—"

"I mean I'm not falling into any more of your little schemes. Too risky! Life's entirely too short for me to spend any of it in jail."

"You're afraid, huh?" sneered Yandle, sticking his arms akimbo.

"Move over a step, Pencil. I want to watch Sam, too. I sure am afraid—of what my deputies know already or may find out in the future. I'll take no more chances on Buff Warren—not a chance!"

"This Piper incident was pure bad luck," declared Yandle. "Nobody could have foreseen—"

"Except Buff. He foresaw, and now look at the damned thing!"

"Look here, Joe!" said Sam Caltrop. "You can't turn me down this way. You've always been a good friend of mine, and I was intending to fix up Piper's escape with the others. Of course, we can't allow any of them to stay in jail. We've got to get them out of the way."

"Say not so, brother. We haven't got to do anything. What you may have to do is something in which I'm not interested. Don't slam the door on your way out."

"We can't leave the affair in this shape," Yandle declared desperately. "We—"

"This is my business," interrupted Caltrop. "You're out of it, Yandle."

Yandle turned on the cattleman like an angry bobcat.

"No, I'm not out of it! I'm too deeply involved to permit you to handle it in any way. I started it, and I'm going to finish it myself. And don't think you won't pay my bill, either. I'll be wearing my knife after this!"

"You can—" began Sam in a rage.

Yandle cut him short.

"Cool off and think it over. I'll be in my office all afternoon."

When Yandle was gone, Sam Caltrop remained to gnaw his nails and stare gloomily at the floor.

"This is one fine trick to play on me!" he said at last. "Can't we fix it up some way, Joe?"



The sheriff shook his head.

"I can't help you, Sam. I've got myself to look out for."

"You're the doctor," said Sam simply.

"I sure am. Here's Buff and that infernal girl. I wonder what they want!"

Buff entered, leaving the front door open. Through the doorway one could see the Fair wagon, with Gilian on the seat, one booted foot on the brake lever. The girl looked in at the open door. Buff stared at Caltrop.

"What are you scrouging over in the corner for?" he demanded curiously. "You seem to have a nosebleed, too."

"I have," mumbled Caltrop through his handkerchief. "What do you want?"

"You're a mind reader! I want to know where to leave your beef."

"Oh!" murmured Caltrop, with what appeared to be a sigh of relief. "Leave it with Yandle. I'll—er—send for it later."

### XXIII

BUFF, crossing Main Street on his way to the Blue Pigeon Store, to pay for Rainbow's split-ear bridle, saw that in the dust which caused him to halt in his tracks. "That" was the clear-cut print of the near fore hoof of a barefooted horse—a print that had been made within the last two hours by a hoof with a break in the wall of the outside quarter.

With great presence of mind, Buff thrust a hand into an empty trouser pocket, slapped the outside of the pocket vigorously, and then turned it inside out. This to impress any casual observer with the idea that he had lost something. Next he stooped and began to sweep with his eyes the tracked street surface. He found three other corresponding hoof marks with the peculiar break in the outside quarter wall.

Buff was far from being the best tracker in the Territory, but he was reasonably certain that these four marks were precisely similar to that of the near forefoot of the barefooted horse ridden by the small-footed rider who had met the Twisted Foot on Packsaddle Creek.

At the thought of the potentialities connoted by this new bit of evidence, Buff's heart leaped within him. Since Gilian's bay had been wearing shoes for several days, it followed as logically as the tail does the cow that the horse from Packsaddle had made these hoof marks in Main Street, and therefore his lady was auto-

matically absolved of any affinity with the Twisted Foot.

So, because Buff wished beyond everything to believe these things, he did believe, and was properly ashamed that he should have entertained for even a fleeting instant the thought that Gilian might possibly have met the man. She had not met him. The sun shone brighter. The birds sang cheerily.

Then memory, temporarily dozing, awoke and promptly dimmed the sunshine and hushed the song of the birds. If Gilian had not met the Twisted Foot on Packsaddle Creek, she had met some one else beyond the Fair cornfield on the evening prior to Tresawna's hearing before Judge Dolan. For all Buff knew to the contrary, she had met the unknown on Packsaddle, too. The girl's manner when he accused her of having been there before the Tresawna incident was evidence of this.

Buff swore under his breath. He had cleared up one annoying mystery only to plunge waist deep into the cloudy waters of another.

Indeed, how did he know he had cleared up the first mystery? Might there not be other horses with hoofbreaks similar to the one possessed by the Packsaddle horse? Might not one of these horses—horses owned and ridden by as many innocent men—have made the marks he had just found?

Buff groaned in spirit. Here he was right back at the beginning of things, drifting, drifting the Lord knew where! What he preëminently needed at that particular moment was action—action that would stir him up and give him something else to think about. The fates discerned his extremity, and sent him what he needed.

"Lost something?" inquired the sarcastically solicitous voice of the storekeeper and postmaster, Calloway.

Buff made no reply. Since his defection from the ranks of the cattlemen, the townsfolk had not gone out of their way to hold speech with him; nor had he gone out of his way to force them to do so. Manifestly he could not constantly repeat the example of Stony Flint; so he had come to accept without much rancor the position beyond the pale where he had placed himself.

Concentrating on the matter in hand as he was, he hardly realized that he was being addressed until Calloway spoke again.

"Lost something, Buff?"

"Six bits," was the brief reply.

"Y' ought to wear your pants inside your boots," suggested Calloway.

"I usually do, but I didn't this morning, not having a bright fellow like you around to hand out free advice—which is the only thing I ever heard of you giving away. Is there anything else I can do for you this morning, Cal?"

Calloway would have been pleased to take the matter up, but he had seen what happened to Stony Flint. He did not care to prod that uncertain citizen, Buff Warren, into a quarrel. Still, he could not resist mentioning what had sprung into his mind at the sight of Buff hunting for something in the dust of Main Street.

"Is it true," he said abruptly, "that that nester—Fair, I think his name is—has been a convict?"

Buff stood up and stared.

"Who told you that lie?" he asked sharply.

"It ain't true, huh?"

"I said it was a lie!"

"I suppose you know. A man in my business hears lots of gossip."

"A man in your business wants to be more careful about passing on the gossip he hears! Where did you hear it?"

"They were talking about it in the store this morning, while they were waiting for the mail."

"Who's they?"

"I'd rather not say. I don't want to make trouble."

"You should have thought of that sooner! Who's they?"

"Well—er—if you must know, one was Yandle, and the other was the sheriff."

"Yandle and the sheriff! Come on, Cal! We're going to see Yandle, we are."

"Not me," declared Calloway hastily.

"Oh, yes, you are, Cal! Don't think you ain't for a holy minute! You'll go if I have to drag you. Would you like a session with me right here and now? Folks are already beginning to stop, look, and listen."

"I'll go with you," said Calloway, whose standing in the community was a tender plant, to be cherished exceedingly.

Accordingly, to Yandle's they went.

They found the yellow-haired attorney alone, immersed in the perusal of documents of legal appearance. At their entrance he greeted them with the top of the morning and his best smile. Buff was not in the least deceived. He knew what Yan-

dle thought of him. He returned the greeting coldly, and sprang his attack at once.

"Calloway tells me you were saying in the post office this morning that Fair, over on the Lazy, is a convict. How about it?"

Yandle regarded Calloway with unconcealed malevolence.

"I heard he was a convict," he said slowly. "What of it?"

"There's this of it," replied Buff. "It's a lie—y' understand?"

"I think you will find that it is the truth," countered the lawyer, tapping on the desk with a pencil.

"It's a lie," repeated Buff; "and anybody who passes it on is a liar, too."

"You can't bluff me," snapped the lawyer, his hand stealing under his vest.

"I'm doing it," observed Buff steadily. "What you waiting for? Why don't you pull that knife?"

The lawyer did not draw. His hand came away empty.

"You've got a gun," he said shortly.

Buff's hand shot out and fastened on the lawyer's wrist. With a jerk, he hoisted Pencil from his chair and slammed him against the wall. Holding him there with one hand, he inserted the other beneath his captive's armpit and extracted the dirk that cuddled there in a leather sheath.

"Now!" began Buff.

A sudden expectant widening of the lawyer's eyes, which were looking over his shoulder, caused him to duck and spring to one side. As he sprang, he swung Pencil away from the wall, and into the place where he himself had been standing.

The lawyer squeaked and tried to writhe to one side. Too late! A heavy stoneware quart bottle of ink, with which Calloway was improving a heaven-sent opportunity to knock senseless the officious Mr. Warren, struck Mr. Yandle on the shoulder, and bottle and attorney went to the floor together. The latter did not break, but the former crashed into a thousand pieces, deluging the latter with Binford's best blue-black writing fluid, warranted to turn the color of jet as it dried.

Buff did not witness the transformation. He was too busily engaged, just then, in administering a thorough thumping to the perfidious postmaster.

Calloway fought back as best he could. He outweighed the deputy by twenty pounds, but handling letters and groceries is not as conducive to muscle building as

punching the wily cow. It must be said in his favor that he was a glutton for punishment. Buff was compelled to knock him down four times before he would consent to stay down for more than thirty seconds. Even then he raised himself on an elbow and cursed Buff with freedom.

"I'll get up in a minute!" he snarled through split lips. "You ain't through with me yet!"

"Is that so?" said Buff, who was growing bored with the monotony of pounding a jelly bag. "Is that so?" he repeated, and, kneeling beside the postmaster, he applied the heel of his hand to the latter's nose. "Say 'uncle,'" he directed, and applied the requisite pressure.

"Uncle! Uncle!" cried Calloway.

"Good enough! I haven't time to fool with you any more to-day. Come around when I ain't so busy."

So saying, he seized Calloway by the collar, dragged him to the door, opened it, and incontinently threw him out on the sidewalk.

Buff returned to the lawyer, who, surrounded by stoneware shards, sat in a puddle of ink and tenderly massaged his right shoulder. The sight was not lacking in humor, and Buff laughed.

"You'll have a job getting that ink off your face," was his comment.

The lawyer, still somewhat dazed, put up to his cheek an involuntary hand.

"Is there ink on my face?"

"You just now smeared over the only spot that was white," Buff assured him with relish. "I guess you'll have to retire from our well known midst till you bleach out. About that gossip concerning Fair, Yandle—where did you get your information?"

Yandle was too wretched to beat about the bush. His shoulder hurt abominably.

"The sheriff told me," he said, between a grunt and a groan.

"The sheriff did, did he? Thanks, Yandle! Try horse liniment on that shoulder. So long!"

The door slammed. Buff was on his way to see the sheriff.

"What's this I hear about you saying Mr. Fair is a convict?" inquired Buff.

"You can't pick any fight with me on that account," promptly replied the sheriff, his hand nevertheless closing on the butt of the gun in the open drawer of his desk. "Somebody told me."

"I don't believe," Buff declared with judicial calm, "that you can get that gun out of the drawer quicker than I can pull. Those long barrels are unhandy in a narrow space. Cramps your style!"

"You may be right," the sheriff told him; "but you needn't think you can lollop in here and bulldoze me like you did Stony Flint."

"All the same," flung back Buff, "I'm going to know where you got your information, or else you can set that gun of yours a going any time you feel like it. I still think I can beat you to it," he added thoughtfully.

The sheriff smiled wryly.

"I'd sure like to take you up, if only to find out how fast you ain't. By the way, you haven't any notion that I'm scared of you, have you?"

"Why, no," replied Buff. "I know you better than that, Joe; but I ain't throwing any bluff about the gun play either. I meant what I said."

"I believe you—you're just that much of a fool. Well, I'll tell you. Simon, the new Starlight bartender, told me this Fair man was a convict."

"I'll see Simon. In the mean time, Joe, anybody who passes on this story, I don't care who it is, is a liar by the clock!"

The sheriff considered.

"If you're going to dry nurse those Fairs forty ways from the jack like this, you'll have a job!"

"Think so? We'll see."

Buff nodded pleasantly to the sheriff and withdrew—backward. His erstwhile trustful nature, since the episode in Yandle's office, had been replaced by one darkly suspicious of the world in general.

"The idjit!" muttered the sheriff when Buff was gone. "He'll do exactly as he says, damn him! I wonder how much he knows?"

But echo answered not, and the sheriff sought solace from the bottle that abode among the handcuffs in the side compartment of his desk.

Buff's method of approach with the Starlight bartender differed slightly from those he had employed with Yandle and the sheriff. He entered the saloon, bought a drink, and nursed it along until the place was empty of other customers. Then, reaching across the bar, he possessed himself of the bartender's wrist, jerked him sprawling halfway across the bar, and laid the cold



blade of Yandle's dirk on the back of his neck.

"How come you're spreading around that lie about Mr. Fair?"

The bartender writhed.

"I dunno what you mean!" he protested chokingly.

Buff gently pricked him with the point of the blade.

"Yes, you do too know what I mean," he contradicted. "The sheriff told me you told him Mr. Fair was a convict. How about it?"

"I—I heard he was."

"So you thought you'd pass it on! That was careless of you. Who told you?"

The man made no reply beyond an unintelligible gurgle of woe. As an aid to a more complete understanding between them, Buff again had recourse to the point of the dirk. The bartender suddenly threw his tongue with a vengeance.

"Mis' Fernie told me!" he bellowed.

Mrs. Fernie! Lil Fernie! Buff was so surprised that he let the knife point remain where it was till the bartender's anguished yelping recalled him to the current situation.

Buff removed the knife from the neighborhood of the bartender's neck, but he retained his grasp on the bartender. It had come to him that he need not have been surprised that the trail led to or through Mrs. Fernie. To scratch and spit is the nature of the cat. Lil was merely running true to form. Unable to hurt Buff, she was striking at the girl he loved with this shameful slander against her father.

If the slander had been directed against himself, Buff would have let it pass. Mrs. Fernie was a woman, and there is small gain or honor to be won in a stupid wrangle with a woman; but the Fairs must be protected. Buff decided to see Lil.

"Where's Mrs. Fernie?" he demanded of the bartender.

"She's right here," the lady answered for herself.

Buff turned his head in the direction of the voice, and saw Mrs. Fernie standing at the end of the bar. Steadying her arm by resting an elbow on the edge of the bar, she was aiming at his head a Colt six-shooter of the largest size.

"Let that man go!" she directed.

"Not yet," denied Buff.

"If you don't let him go," she said quite

coolly, "I'll put a hole in your face halfway between your mind and your mouth!"

Buff looked at Lil. Her right eye, staring at him along the sights, was as hard as steel and as cold as a miser's heart.

"You don't dare shoot," he declared, with a calmness that he did not feel.

The reptilian eye battled with his steady gaze. The two wills clashed like the swords of duelists. Buff knew that if his eye wavered for a single instant, she would shoot. He discovered that to outstare a human eye in combination with the muzzle of a forty-five Colt is an arduous enterprise; yet he did not so much as twitch an eyelid.

He saw the murderous purpose strengthen in the woman's eye, saw her white finger crook on the trigger. In another instant there would be a burst of flame and smoke, and it would be all over. He held his breath, but still his eyes did not waver.

Then, with an abruptness that was startling, he saw the resolution pass from the woman's eye. She removed her finger from the trigger, lowered the hammer to the safety notch, and laid the weapon on the counter.

"You win!" she said wearily. "I can't do it. You've got too much nerve!"

Buff drew a slow breath. There was a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach. It had been touch and go.

Lil leaned against the end of the bar, holding her head in her hands.

"I wish you'd drag it!"

"In a minute," Buff said. "Why are you telling folks Mr. Fair is a convict?"

"Because he is," she replied.

"Can you prove it?"

"I don't need to," she said wearily. "You may prove it yourself. It's all in the criminal records of the State of Minnesota. Write to the warden of the penitentiary at Stillwater. He will tell you that fifteen years ago Abijah Fair was convicted of murdering his own brother at Cherry Grove, in Redstone County, and sentenced to twenty years. He was pardoned out at the end of ten years for good behavior, and because he went blind. Fair's own son, Jack Fair, was indicted on the same charge as an accessory, and got the same sentence. He's still in jail."

"I don't believe it," declared Buff. "Go on back where you belong," he added, to the bartender, as he released his captive and backed out of the saloon.

*(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*



# Saul the Fifth

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO LOVED NEW ENGLAND AND A  
YOUNG MAN WHO HATED IT

By Mella Russell McCallum

JUDY LANE walked quickly along the left edge of the macadam road—the left edge, because of the traffic. She was a waitress at the Pines Tea Room, and this was her mid-afternoon interval of leisure.

She wore a short gray plaid skirt, and a round-collared blouse, which made her look younger than her nineteen years. Her light brown hair was cut boyishly in half curls close to the head. Her gray eyes held live lights. She was not beautiful, yet there was beauty about her—in the cool, varying color of her cheeks, in the liteness of her body, and in the independent lift of her small head.

As she walked, she breathed consciously of the pine fragrance. Occasionally she looked up at the brilliant, the almost hard blue of the sky.

"I just love Maine!" she said out loud. "It's like coming home!"

Yet only three years ago she had never been out of New York, save for a few short vacations.

The pine wood through which the highway led gave way to an open field, where men were haying. The smell of the new hay thrilled her.

"I just love it!" she repeated. "I wish my grandfather had stayed here in New England!"

She crossed a brook. Her steps lagged. She liked the brown-gray water, going cleanly over stones; but this was not her destination.

Farther up a hill she trudged, until she came to a deserted farmhouse, set on a knoll, in the company of giant elms—a house of mournful dignity and purity of line. Judy didn't know a great deal about architecture, but she knew that she loved this calm, oblong structure with its noble

chimneys. She wished that she might go in at the paneled entrance, under the fanlight. She had an instinctive idea that the door would give to a healthy shove. Perhaps, some day—

For the present she contented herself with exploring the family graveyard, which lay in a small valley near the road, some two hundred feet from the house.

"Wouldn't mother think I was crazy, spending my time in a cemetery?" she chuckled.

The plot was fenced with rusted iron. A half grown pine stood guard, and a brave growth of ivy defied weeds. It was a God's acre of neglect; yet the tall grasses were graceful, waving over the crumbling stones in the summer breeze.

Yes, her mother would think she was losing her senses. Her mother hadn't approved of her answering the advertisement, in the first place.

"Why in the world do you want to go up there and be a servant?" Mrs. Lane, yawning in her morning kimono, had wanted to know.

Judy hadn't been able to answer the question satisfactorily. She didn't know why she had wanted to come to Maine. She didn't know why she loved it so well now—unless it was because her grandfather had been a New Hampshire farmer, who had uprooted himself in order to win a red-cheeked Brooklyn lassie.

At any rate, she had postponed the completion of her business course, and—according to her mother—had hired out as a servant. And here she was, seating herself in cross-legged content, beside the grave of one Margaret Burnham, who had departed this life for the pleasures of heaven—so the stone said—about the time that her own mother was born in Manhattan.

Judy had pieced the dates and names into history. The oldest stone was marked 1798, and bore the name of Eliza Burnham. Eliza's husband had been Saul—Saul the First, Judy called him.

Among their children was another Saul—Saul the Second. Then there had seemed to follow a generation without the name of Saul. The next Saul—Saul the Third—and his wife Matilda were the most recent burials.

Their son, Saul the Fourth, had died before his time, at the age of forty-five. The old people, Saul the Third and Matilda, had gone to their last rest in 1916, within a month of each other, both past eighty years of age.

Only seven years ago the last graves had been made; yet the place was as impersonally overgrown as if it had been seventy years.

Judy wasn't a melancholy person. There was nothing gruesome about spending an hour there. In down town New York scores of busy people eat their lunches in St. Paul's graveyard every day, without disrespect or depression. It seemed perfectly natural for Judy to come here after the chatter of tea-room guests, and the interminable orders of cinnamon toast and chicken salad sandwiches.

Sometimes she brought a magazine to read; but to-day she just sat and wondered about the race of Burnhams. Hadn't the old people left any children, or grandchildren? If so, where were they? Who owned the place?

She could have asked Mrs. Welch, the shrewd gentlewoman who conducted the tea room; but it was more fun to imagine things. After all, what did the truth matter to Judy Lane of New York? In September she would go back home and finish her course, and set about finding a position as stenographer, and that would be the end of it.

She imagined the Burnham men as stern and just, as her grandfather had been. The women were probably meek or severe. A pious, God-fearing race; yet there must have been flare-outs in the blood, for Ebenezer Burnham's stone read "lost at sea," and David Burnham had taken to wife one Trinita Juarez.

Judy pictured painful scenes between shocked elders and a romantic girl, or a headstrong boy determined to go to sea. The little wife with the Spanish-sounding

name couldn't have had a merry time here! Ah, well, they all slept peacefully now, poor dears!

## II

As Judy amused herself thinking whimsically about the Burnhams, a Ford drew up beside the road. Two workmen jumped out. They didn't see her. One took a tape line from his pocket and began to measure off some ground energetically. They talked and gestured. Presently they drove away.

Now what had those men been about? Judy felt a sense of disaster. Had the property, through abandonment and unpaid taxes, reverted to the State? Had it been sold? The men hadn't glanced at the house or grounds. They just measured several yards near the road.

The next day Judy had no leisure. She and the other waitress, Harriet Wilkie, alternated in serving the afternoon tea guests. Harriet was a law student, in Maine for her health, and working because she must.

Two days later, when Judy went back to the Burnham place, she found a pile of lumber dumped beside the road. There was no one about, but some one had been digging in the clay.

"I don't know what they're up to, but they're going to spoil the peace and quiet. I feel it in my bones, and it's a wicked shame!"

She took her favorite seat beside Margaret Burnham, and addressed the buried clan collectively.

"Why don't you rise up and stop them, digging up your land?"

The grasses swayed calmly. Judy sighed.

"You're helpless, aren't you, old dears? Well, whatever it is, it's a shame! Here I'd counted on having this adorable place to myself all summer!"

She looked toward the house. Some one was coming out through the door—a man. That was natural, she thought swiftly. If there were changes in connection with the property, of course there would have to be people about. It was probably only a question of time before her occupancy would be questioned.

The man was dark and lean. Evidently he had seen her, for he was coming that way—coming with a step that was curiously graceful for this part of the world. His clothes had a foreign look. He lifted his hat. Judy saw that he was young.

"I suppose I ought to go," she thought; "yet how do I know but he is the one who ought to go?"

He was quite close now, outside the fence. His features were regular, and of dark olive color, and a pair of bright blue eyes looked out of them incongruously.

"How do you do?" he said. "Please don't let me disturb you."

He spoke with complete politeness, yet there was a note of sarcasm.

"How do you do?" replied Judy.

"Do you find them"—he waved to indicate the graves—"good company?"

"Very!"

"I wish I might say as much!"

He laughed a short, unyouthful laugh. Judy leaned forward suddenly.

"You must be Saul the Fifth," she said.

He stared.

"I am Saul Burnham," he admitted; "and—yes, I am the fifth to bear the name. May I come in?"

"It is your graveyard," Judy started to say, but she changed it to, "It is I who am intruding."

He laughed again, not so bitterly, and took off his hat. Judy saw his crisp black hair, and the proud line of his head.

"With your permission—" He sat down under the small pine, his back to the fence, and drew his knees up to his chin. "I am happy to have a visitor. May I ask to whom I owe the honor?"

Judy told him briefly who she was, and why she was here.

"I am a servant at the Pines," she concluded, with downcast, dancing eyes.

"In America servants do not admit the calling. If this were England or France—but I'll make a guess. You are a college girl, working for fun?"

"Yes and no. My college is only a business college, and I'm working to pay for my vacation; but it is fun."

He looked at her curiously.

"Fun—here?"

"Fun of a sort. I've been very happy here."

"You must be a strange girl!"

"It's not strange to be attracted by your beautiful place."

"Attracted by it!" He laughed. "I hate it!"

Judy had invited the remark, yet it shocked her. She rose.

"I must be getting back," she said coldly.

"You didn't go so soon last time. You didn't go until half past four."

"Were you here then?" Judy gasped.

"Oh, yes! I live here now."

There was something more than finality in the young man's tone—there was tragedy.

"Oh, how terrible of me! I never dreamed there was any one about."

"Not terrible in the least. I am flattered. I sincerely hope that the sight of me will not curtail the—ah—pleasure you take in the society of my ancestors. Please sit down again, Miss Lane!"

Judy didn't like the sarcasm. It wasn't healthy. It would have been cheap, but for the accompanying wistfulness and the hint of tragedy that lay behind it. She sat down.

"I hope you'll pardon me, but I've watched you." He could smile charmingly when he wished. "I wish you'd tell me why you are so happy."

Judy laughed nervously. He was so young, yet so unboylike! In the first place, he didn't seem American; and that almost comical intensity!

"I've never had anything to make me unhappy, that I know of." Judy shrugged, to dispose of the question, after the manner of a normal girl. "Just gone to school and business college. There's a lot going on all the time at home; and now, up here—I love it!"

"You are originally from New England—Maine, perhaps?"

"I've lived in New York all my life; but it's in my blood, I think. My grandfather came from New Hampshire. It must be in your blood, too, if you're a Burnham."

He shook his head.

"My father—is here." He pointed to the grave of Saul the Fourth. "My mother—" He paused, then continued in a firmer tone: "My mother was Brazilian. No doubt you have heard the story—the choice morsel of the countryside."

"I haven't heard a thing, and I haven't asked."

Judy spoke tartly. She was sorry for his evident unhappiness, but he exasperated her.

"Then I will not burden you with my history."

"I'd rather hear it from your own lips—if you want to tell me."

He bowed almost formally.

"My father ran away to sea, on a fruit steamer. Once in about every fifty years a Burnham has done that. After several years he established a small exporting business in La Guayra. I was born there; but when my mother died, we gave everything to my maternal grandparents, and went to Havana. I was seven. My father tutored me all the time. He wanted me to go to Harvard—where he had expected to go. Our business prospered, and we traveled in Europe."

Judy was staring stonily at nothing, to conceal a lively interest.

"As my father grew older, he began to think more and more about his youth, and this place. When he finally fell ill, we came here—and he died. He was only forty-five. We had used up all our money by that time, so I stayed on with my grandparents. I was thirteen. I liked my grandmother; but grandfather! I tried to like him, but every instinct, every shred of training and memory, fought against him. He and I quarreled continuously. It is not a pleasant memory, a little boy quarreling with an old man. Then, after four years, Europe went to war, and I ran away to France. I was accepted for the Foreign Legion."

Judy forgot to hide her fascination.

"How absolutely thrilling!"

"Thrilling—yes, while it lasted; but my grandfather never forgave me. He had other property, in Boston—excellent, renting property. He left that to my distant cousin, and I have this wretched farm, which, by the terms of the will, I cannot sell. It was his revenge."

"You don't like farming?"

"I know very little about it. Of course I do not like it!"

Judy twisted away a smile.

"Two years after I left here my grandparents died, as you see. I have postponed the evil day as long as I dared. I had a position with the French government for a time—a small post, but enough to enable me to have the companionship of my friends over there. That came to an end, and there was no alternative—to this. If I had not come before the end of the year, this also would have gone to my distant cousin."

Judy was trying to reserve judgment. His story was romantic, to her, but she was sure she had never seen worse sportsmanship. She rose determinedly.

"Thank you for telling me," she said. "You've certainly had an interesting life. Now I must really go."

Saul the Fifth was on his feet with sudden grace.

"I beg that you will not discontinue the visits—to my family," he said, with a grave bow that seemed to Judy of New York to savor of old Spain itself.

"I couldn't think of intruding any more."

He barred the gateway.

"Please, as a favor—to a not too happy person?"

There was something small-boyish in the incongruous blue eyes.

"Well, perhaps, some time," Judy agreed.

When she was well down the road, it occurred to her that still she didn't know what the pile of lumber was for.

"Well!" she exploded to herself. "I never saw such a disgruntled baby in all—my—life!"

### III

SEVERAL days passed, during which the neighborhood gossip percolated to her. She overheard Mrs. Whittle, the cook, talking to Mrs. Welch.

"He broke his grandpa's heart, they say," asserted Mrs. Whittle. "It serves him right to have to stay here!"

"Poor boy!" Mrs. Welch replied, in her thoughtful, modulated voice. "Old Mrs. Burnham never understood the mixed blood in little Saul's veins."

"Mixed blood, huh! His mother was a flighty dancin' woman, they say. Well, his grandpa fixed him, all right! He's done with traipsin' around the world, unless he wants to lose a valuable piece of property. The old gentleman was mighty comfortable, Mis' Welch. That Boston property would 'a' let young Saul keep on a traipsin' and skylarkin'. His grandpa fixed him!"

"It's a fine farm, if he only knew it. There isn't a house standing that's more sturdy, either. Poor boy, he doesn't appreciate what he has!"

"You can't expect no dancin' blood to appreciate the Burnham place, Mis' Welch."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Welch.

Judy debated with herself about the partial promise she had made about going back to the graveyard.



She was honest enough to admit that she would like to go. Saul Burnham was different from any one she had ever known. What color, what romance, his life had held! She knew the countryside would disapprove of her going there.

It was something removed from girlish interest, or disregard of convention, that finally led her, a week later, to keep her half given word. It was the open misery of the young man himself.

The pile of lumber was still there by the road. She made her way to the plot, and sat down to read. It was fifteen minutes before the owner appeared. He swept off his hat rather grandly, but his smile was boyish.

"And how is the embryo private secretary?" he inquired.

"Quite well, thank you. And the discontented landowner?"

She could have bitten her tongue for that. He smiled wryly.

"I dare say I do make a rather bad impression."

"That was rude of me. I beg your pardon."

"You needn't. I see that I must improve my manners, if I am to be a permanent resident."

He seated himself opposite her.

"Then you are really going to stay? I'm glad. I was afraid you wouldn't."

"One doesn't throw away one's patrimony. I have no choice but to stay; but"—a gleam sprang into his eyes—"I shall not operate the farm."

"How can you stay, then? You say you are poor."

"Do you see that lumber? That is the beginning of my means of livelihood. I am about to erect a temple, Miss Lane."

"A temple?"

"Yes—a temple to the great god gasoline. Inquiry has proved that this territory is not overrun with such temples, and the highway passes my door. What more logical than that I should cater to the needs of tourists?"

"Good grief, a gas station!" Judy gasped. "Right in front of your house! Oh, you wouldn't do that?"

"Ah, but I would! I have already hired the proper person to run it, and we shall be purveyors of food, as well."

"Oh, oh! Not hot dogs! Don't tell me you're going to have a hot dog stand here!"

"I am sorry my plan does not meet with your approval. There is, I have discovered, profit in it. I hope to make enough to gain a little respite over the winter."

"But your grandfather—and your lovely view—"

Judy choked over the prospect. The gracious slope of lawn, the elms around the house—the whole effect would be lost. A gas station and food stand! Lithographs of high-complexioned girls eating ice cream and drinking doubtful-looking red fluids! The pine fragrance overcome by acrid fumes of gasoline!

"I think you're wicked!" she wound up sharply.

His eyes glinted again; and then she knew that curious gleam for malice. He was repaying his grandfather! Like most old residents, old Mr. Burnham must have been proud of his place and of his view. Saul the Fifth couldn't have found a better revenge.

"Your expression is not too subtle, Miss Lane. I am sorry I offend."

"You ought to be sorry! You're ungrateful! You don't appreciate what you have. I live in a five-room flat with four other people, and I never get a breath of country air, or a beautiful vista, without traveling miles and miles for it. You have this—*this*—and you put up a gas station on it!"

He flung out his hands.

"But I am not a farmer. I must live!"

"Nonsense!"

Judy hadn't intended to say so much. She knew it was hard to stop, once she got started. She silenced herself now by shutting her mouth hard.

"Our viewpoints seem to differ," he went on. "Have you ever been up here in the winter, when the pumps are frozen, and the snow is three, four, five feet deep? If you had, I think you would be glad of your five-room flat."

"But there must be a way, without *desecrating*!"

"That is a strong word in the mouth of a babe."

He smiled sadly. Judy let go the reins then.

"I'm not the babe you are! Just let me tell you something—you're just peeved, because you didn't get that Boston property, which would have let you live abroad. You're positively the worst sport I ever saw!"

Whereupon she rose in the dignity of five feet three, and walked away.

He sat perfectly still for a long moment. Then he was on his feet, calling:

"Wait! You don't understand—"

Judy kept on her way down the hill.

#### IV

SHE was sorry she had said so much. After all, it had been nothing more than plain meddling. It wasn't her concern if an heir wished to execute petty revenge. Saul Burnham was a baby, a poor sport—but he was also a most wretched boy. She hadn't given him a particle of sympathy and understanding. She had gone back because she had felt sorry for him; yet she had done nothing but scold.

Well, the mischief was done. She had discharged all her ammunition and never hit the mark at all; for Harriet Wilkie informed her, the next day, that the gas station was being built. She had told Harriet—with reservations—about her encounter with Saul the Fifth.

For herself, she missed the peace of the hours she had spent in the old graveyard. Well, it was done, that was all!

The neighborhood was divided on the subject of the gas station. Many farmers had erected tourists' supply stands on their property. Many others deplored the custom—deplored the tourists generally. Mrs. Whittle veered, and told Mrs. Welch that, in her opinion, it wasn't a bad idea.

"It shows he's got a little gumption, anyway," Mrs. Whittle said.

"It's a sin, to my mind," Mrs. Welch replied. "His beautiful view will be spoiled. I would rent the place from him for a tea room—it's a better location than this—but I suppose that wouldn't be enough of a revenge to suit him."

"Well, a gas station 'll be revenge, all right! His grandpa won't rest easy in his grave!"

Mrs. Welch sighed thoughtfully.

"A food stand so near will hurt my business, too," she added.

The road to Yarmouth, the nearest town, led past the Burnham place. One day during the next week Judy had occasion to go to Yarmouth. She walked by the half completed gas station without turning her head. The tail of her eye told her that a tall figure was standing halfway up the path that led to the house, and that the figure was

lifting its hat with a foreign formality. Judy never looked.

Another week passed. The incident was done, Judy kept repeating. She had met an unusual boy, with an unusual and suffering soul—and she had bungled the contact to suffocation. There was nothing she could do now. She had too much pride, she told herself.

She was humbled when his letter came:

Yarmouth, Maine, July 17, 1923.

DEAR MISS LANE:

The exacting hours of your employment prevent me from calling on you personally. I wish to make a request—will you not continue to avail yourself of the hospitality of my ancestors? I assure you I shall not annoy you with my presence.

Respectfully,

SAUL BURNHAM.

Judy's conscience hurt her. He must have swallowed a good deal of his pride to write that!

She considered. She would answer by mail. No—she would just appear some day, as though nothing had happened. She hoped he wouldn't keep his word about being absent.

She went the next day.

The carpenters were at work on the gas station. Their hammers were noisy. She sat down beside Margaret Burnham, and opened her book.

Those hammers! The old peace was gone. Tap, tap—tap, tap—like a series of snappy dots with a sharp pencil on a clean sheet of paper.

It was no use. She would stay a few minutes, as a gesture of politeness, and then she would go away. She and the heir of the Burnham place disagreed on fundamentals. They had rasped each other's nerves from the very start. Foolish to glaze over the top of such a disorderly mess as their whole acquaintance had been!

She wondered if the young man was in his house, looking at her. Not likely! He was probably in Portland, buying supplies for his new business—strings of sausages, and the like.

She couldn't sit still. She rose; but, instead of walking away, she found herself going up toward the house. Her heart was pounding hard. She was doing a silly, useless thing.

The sound of the knocker echoed loudly.

Saul Burnham opened the door, bowing gravely.

"I am honored! Will you come in?"

"Oh, no, thanks! I—I just wanted to tell you—why don't you come out and talk to me? I won't scold any more."

The words must have been formed in Judy's subconsciousness, for they startled her. He smiled.

"I thank you. Have you seen the interior of my house?"

Judy found herself inside a hall that was somber and long, with discolored walls. A slender-legged table stood at her left, and beyond, in the gloom, she caught the pure sweep of the stair rail.

"Oh!" she breathed, and was herself again. "Oh, it's adorable! I've always wanted to come in."

They entered the parlor. Here was the old New England, save for dust and dilapidation. There was no touch of the younger generation.

"Even wax flowers," Judy gasped. "But will you tell me why these things haven't been stolen long ago?"

He shrugged.

"My guardian angel has preserved them for my pleasure, no doubt."

Judy bit her lip. She would not scold!

Haircloth and mahogany—samplers and wax flowers—brass candlesticks—braided rugs—a cabinet of curios from the Orient—a Swiss music box, which played six tunes; but Judy saw more. She saw the room cleaned, the fresh, putty-colored walls, the gay chintzes, the wide floor boards painted dark, the braided rugs washed and repaired.

When they went out into the great kitchen, she saw not the dust and the grime, but a yellow floor, and checked curtains, and geraniums. Upstairs were plain, capacious dressers and Revolutionary mirrors and four-posters.

"Oh, you lucky, lucky thing!" Judy almost cried out; but she did not. She only uttered little crows and gasps of joy.

Downstairs again, he showed her the one corner he had touched. Next the fireplace stood a table with books and a pipe and a lamp. A frayed easy-chair was drawn close, and behind were some books on a shelf—not old books, but Stevenson and Conrad and Kipling. For some reason Judy wanted to cry.

They went out into the sunshine.

"What a lawn, if it were mowed!" Judy thought. "What a place for a hammock and wicker chairs!"

They sat down under one of the elms. Judy turned her back to the road. The

hammers were still making their staccato dots.

"I suppose you will be glad to get back to your business college, will you not?"

Saul Burnham was trying to be as nice as possible, too.

"I suppose so," Judy replied.

"You'll make an excellent business woman, I think. You have—shall I say a certain necessary plunging quality?"

Judy laughed.

"And what will you do this winter?"

"I don't know." He frowned. He looked at her suddenly. "What would you suggest my doing?"

She jumped.

"How can I tell? I don't know what you're adapted for."

"I was to have studied law, but I have no taste for it. I have very little money with which to study anything, now. My position after the war was routine clerical work, which I hate. I am not artistic or scientific, and I cannot sell gasoline all winter."

"But there must be something you like to do. What is the nicest memory you have—not a sentimental memory, but a memory of doing something?"

"When I was nine, my father and I boarded at a truck farm outside Paris. They wouldn't call it a farm here, it was so small; but the vegetables that Anatole Leblanc used to raise! Every inch of soil was used. Tall plants shaded short plants that needed shade. While my father lay in his hammock, almost too ill to give me lessons, I helped Anatole. I worked for hours at a time, sweating and happy. I loved it; and yet now, when I am undisputed owner of many acres—I hate it!"

Judy selected a long blade of grass, and plucked it carefully, close to the roots. She held it up and examined it, as if she were really seeing it.

"Perhaps—perhaps it isn't the farming itself that you hate. Perhaps it's the disappointment—the having to come to Maine—that makes you hate everything in connection with it."

A groping light came into his eyes.

"Could that be so? I wonder!"

Judy looked at her wrist watch. It was time for her to go.

"I will go with you, if I may," he said.

They walked on the left side of the macadam, because of the traffic—traffic that would soon be patronizing his gas station.

He was seven inches taller than she. They went past the hay field, over the brook, between the pine woods. When they reached the gate of the Pines, he said:

"Good-by, Miss Lane. We didn't quarrel this time."

Judy felt the blood riot into her face.

# V

THERE were other afternoons when they didn't quarrel—when they walked to Yarmouth for Mrs. Welch, or in the other direction, which led to nowhere at all, unless one kept on going. Judy didn't go often to the Burnham place. There was no point in getting herself talked about.

They talked of everything except the gas station. He told her of his colorful, irregular life. His South American memories were blurred with happiness. He said his mother had been always young and laughing. He talked of the strong attachment between his father and himself, and of the gray years after his father died, before he went away. He spoke of the war, a little—not much. He wanted to forget the war.

Judy, in turn, told him about her family and her friends in the city—of her brother Jim, who sold stationery, and her sister Helen, who taught in a kindergarten—of her easy-going little bookkeeper father, and her mother, always fretting about small things. He listened eagerly to the hum-drum details.

She wouldn't have been a normal girl if the superficial aspects of Saul Burnham's friendship hadn't thrilled her. His Latin blood, his years of travel, his Croix de Guerre—yes, and his good looks! Judy had had many boy friends. She had even drifted in and out of two engagements; but she had never before had a boy friend who needed only a cloak and a plume to be a nobleman.

But the gas station! There it stood, half finished, menacing. Judy almost wished it were completed, and supplying patrons. If he was determined to ruin his ancestral home, why, let it be accomplished quickly!

Harriet Wilkie spoke of the delay.

"I'm afraid your friend is dilatory, Judy."

"I know he is."

"And, Judy, I don't want to interfere, but—you aren't in danger of falling in love with him, are you?"

Harriet's eyes were wide behind her glasses.

"Oh, no!" declared Judy airily. "He's not sufficiently grown up to fall in love with. He wasn't spanked enough when he was young."

Harriet looked relieved.

A few minutes later the unspanked young man was waiting for Judy at the gate. There had been an understanding about a hike to Wall Creek.

"Well, where do we go from here?" Judy inquired flippantly.

"Not to Wall Creek, please! To my place."

Her heart sank. She had caught the excitement under his words. It could mean but one thing—the gas station was done, at last, and he wanted her to come and see it in operation.

They walked silently between the pine woods, over the talking creek, by the hay field, and up the hill. Why—where *was* the gas station?

Judy stared. Only a slight roughness, and a difference in the color of the soil, showed where it had stood.

If he expected her to exclaim, he would have to be disappointed, she decided quickly. He would have to offer his own explanations.

Saul the Fifth was apparently undisturbed by such girlish tactics. He looked neither chagrined nor disappointed at her failure to exclaim.

"I have razed my temple," he said. "I wanted you to see."

Judy nodded, waiting. She felt a miserable sense of responsibility.

"There are many things I want to say to you. I wonder, would you be willing to sit again where I first saw you, beside my great-aunt Margaret? I have pictured you sitting there."

Judy's feet were lead. Those grave, contained tones! Saul the Fifth had given up his revenge, and now he was going to tell her that he had decided to give up his patrimony, too, and to go away again, across the ocean.

When they were seated, he began to speak deliberately.

"It was quite true, that which you said. I was not at all a good sport. Peeved, you said I was."

Judy could have screamed. He was overdoing the business of humble pie.

"It wasn't my affair," she choked. "You had a right to do it."



His eyes were fixed on the valley beyond. "You have told me that coming up here was like coming home. You had never been in New England before, yet you recognized the spell it holds over its children. I—I recognized it, too; but I fought it. It seemed so drab and dour. My friends in France are gay and charming. I couldn't bear to give them up; but now I know—I know they never were as real as you are, little Judy!"

He went on presently.

"In my mother's country the flowers are large and bright, and there are birds with gay feathers. In Italy I have seen beauty that has made me ache with sadness; but in the blood of the north there is a longing for a loveliness more subtle—for beauty more rare—for the delicate flowers that grow up here—for the pale, cold sunsets—for the life in the air. I've fought against it. I've said I hated it, but—I love it, too! That old man over there—who never understood—"

He stopped abruptly. Judy knew he was weeping.

"Don't!" she whispered. "Oh, I can't bear it!"

He lifted his head.

"You can't bear it? But you are strong. You can bear anything. You are going back to New York soon, and you will become a successful business woman, I am sure. Some day, if I prove a successful

farmer—but I cannot speak of that now. It wouldn't be fair."

Judy's mind was swaying with the grasses.

"You—a farmer?"

"Yes. It will be different from helping Anatole in his truck gardens, and more difficult. My land is dead, the soil will have to be waked up. I am going to take a course in agriculture this winter, to learn how to do it. I have enough money for that; and next spring"—his eyes came back, narrowed—"next spring I farm in earnest!"

Silence.

"Mrs. Welch says your house would be an ideal location for her tea room. It is a business that wouldn't spoil it—you know her class of customers—and you could go ahead with your farming." Judy spoke slowly. The Yankee blue of his eyes was burning her. She selected a blade of grass with care, and plucked it. "And about that *some day*, when you are a successful farmer—if you don't mind, I'd—I'd rather be a charter member!"

He was on his feet, with his quick grace. Like a courtier, he was assisting her to rise. *A cloak and a plume, and a sword that clanked, and an arrogant lift of head!*

"Judy! Look at me, Judy! I want to see your eyes!"

The grasses swayed calmly among the crumbling stones.

### THE WAYSIDE GARDEN

THERE is a wayside garden  
In a mountain vale afar,  
And the thought of that wayside garden  
Beguiles me like a star.

Would that I might go thither  
About the droop of day,  
With a rising, falling thrush note  
To guide me on my way!

I know that I should find you  
With the twilight in your hair,  
Among the lovely blossoms  
The sweetest blossom there!

You, love, amid your roses  
That would fade into eclipse,  
For there would be no fragrance  
Like the attar of your lips!

Clinton Scollard

# The Look

AS AN ANCIENT POET SAID, IT IS PLEASANT TO BE FOOLISH—  
SOMETIMES

By Rosa Aubrey Wood

IT was all she could do to get to the Garden Club meeting, and she arrived there late. The washing machine had got out of order, and the laundress's temper had followed suit. This had put luncheon back and upset her afternoon with the children—the nurse, of course, was out—so that she had barely time to dump them on an unwilling cook and depart. As she slammed the gate, she glanced back, to see Jacky standing forlornly on the porch, displaying a dirty face and a large, disgraceful hole in his stocking.

Just three suburban blocks away reigned order, leisure, and "culture." Inside the large, cool, slightly darkened reception room, Mrs. Alsop clasped Nan's hot and hastily gloved hand with a serene, bejeweled gesture of welcome, and drew the guest to a chair next her own. With a great sigh of relief, Jacky's mother sank down beside her hostess.

"Made it!" she beamed. "I never thought I would; but really, you know, I'm so tired of fighting the battle of Appomattox with myself cast for the part of General Lee that I thought this time I would be Grant, and let the cook be Lee, just for a change."

Mrs. Alsop eyed her visitor with vague amusement.

"Yes, it's hard on young married people—all these domestic complications. I simply dread seeing Sally marry. Still, so many girls would be so thankful for just *one* of the offers the child has had! I said to her this morning that it's perfectly *awful*, the way she treats the men!"

Nan recalled that Mrs. Alsop, up to a year ago a very sane, intelligent woman, had become the mother of a *débutante*, in which capacity she had shed nearly all her consideration for others, all her interest in

any other subject, and her entire stock of humor.

"Don't let her marry, Mrs. Alsop," insisted Nan solemnly. "I am going to get up a club for the prevention of marriage. If you'll think for just one moment, you'll see it really does an awful lot of harm!"

In the midst of her nonsense, she suddenly knew that some one was listening and smiling. She realized that there was actually a man at the Garden Club, seated not far from Mrs. Alsop. Still feeling his gaze upon her, Nan raised her eyes and saw the look—that God-given expression which some men possess for the joy and despair of womankind. It was an amused and tender glance, saying:

"How beautiful and unspoiled you are! Of course, you are accustomed to admiration, but I alone really appreciate the finest points of your charm, and you permit me to enjoy it. Thank you!"

That look is a pleading and a benediction; and always the looked-upon receives a cocktail, an electric shock, champagne bubbles, and a deep content in one delicious gulp, be she maid, wife, or widow, seventeen or forty-seven.

For Nan the washing machine, her home, children, and poor tired Jack Caperton, her husband, slaving in his office, all mounted upon a magic carpet, and were wafted to that never-never-land to which a spritely wife and mother consigns them oftener than they know.

His eyes asked questions.

"Are you really unhappy, or are you merely playing, you delightful creature?"

And Nan, turning her eyes to the speaker for the afternoon, who was just rising, answered with her profile:

"I am dreadfully bored! Come and find out about me when tea is served."

Thus it came about that Mrs. Jack Caperton walked in the garden, after tea, with the stranger. He had managed the introduction so well that Mrs. Alsop was left with the impression that his only thought was of Sally.

They strolled about the beautiful garden belonging to their hostess, pausing occasionally to gaze blankly at a plant. Nan's purpose was to make the acquaintance of a new man for the first time in years.

"Lovely gardens!" he sighed.

"Beautiful gardens and hissing serpents—they always go together in my mind," she laughed. "In fact, I've been looking for a serpent for years, but I've never heard the faintest hiss."

He gazed at her with appreciation.

"When you came into the room this afternoon, I didn't think you really beautiful." His tone was puzzled. "But there's your way of talking—and you are so wasteful with your sense of humor! You threw it away on that mother-of-the-daughter lady, and there was I down on my knees, picking up the very crumbs of everything you said!"

"Really, now, you don't know how grateful a woman of my age, weighing fifteen pounds more than she should, feels toward you—just sheer gratitude! Is it a new charity to provide walking delegates to walk around and make life worth living once more?"

There was a shadow of seriousness behind her smile. In spite of the fifty ladies present, they were alone in the garden. It was sunset, and robins called to one another gayly.

"You are witty, of course," he started, and stopped as Mrs. Alsop came toward them.

The harmony was broken, the duet ended; but the hostess beamed with satisfaction.

"Glad so many members turned up this afternoon! How are the children, Nan? And are all your antique pieces as charming as ever?"

"The children are beautifully well, thanks, but the way I sometimes feel about that houseful of antiques reminds me of a girl who married a Bostonian. She wanted to escape, so he delicately reminded her of all the nice things he had given her, to which his wife replied, 'Oh, yes, I know! It's a good house, good furniture—and good-by!'"

10

There was laughter as all turned to go. Nan knew that the stranger was calculating every step, so that they should gain the gate together.

"Are you going to let me come along?" he said, in a tone so pitched that the bystanders thought he was saying, "Are not the roses lovely at this season?"

Without replying to his question, she turned once more to Mrs. Alsop, who whispered hurriedly:

"Please keep an eye on Sally to-night at the club! Don't let this Mr. Compton monopolize her. He's been hanging about, and I really think it will drive off the other men!"

They had reached the gate, and casually the man turned with her down the shady street.

Nan's perfectly reliable conscience was shrieking at her, but it had been so long since her consciousness had been completely unhitched from washing machines, romper patterns, and vitamins, that she made no attempt to restrain her impulse to play the game once more.

As they neared her home, he asked if she would be at the club that night.

"No," she replied. "I have a husband who becomes a dangerous maniac at the very sound of dance music."

"Or at the sight of a dancing partner?"

"No—he's just against good times. He doesn't hold with them." She turned and held out her hand. "So glad to have met a serpent at last!"

"When shall I see you again?"

"Where did you come from, and where are you going, anyhow?" demanded the young matron in return.

"I came from Kentucky, and I'm going—to be just here indefinitely."

"Where, here?"

"I'm put up at the club for two weeks."

"Yes, serpents always live in clubs. You are perfect. Good night!"

He detained her.

"Won't you reconsider about the dance to-night?"

"I might," she replied, and disappeared up her twilight walk.

## II

BREATHLESS, Nan paused on her own steps. A wail from within reminded her of several facts—that she had not ordered cereal for the baby's supper; that she had not sent her husband's suit to be pressed;

that she had forgotten the laundress's wages, and had neglected to tell the cook to take little Jacky's temperature at six o'clock. The magic carpet was wafted back instantly, and deposited the entire family upon her shoulders.

Jacky rushed up and embraced her knees. His cheeks were flushed, and he was munching bread and molasses.

"The baby fell and bumped her head. I couldn't watch her every minute! Was busy with the dinner," was the pleasant greeting of the old retainer of some five weeks' stay.

"I oughtn't to have gone!" came the familiar refrain of self-reproach, as she ran upstairs to console baby, who wore a green and blue "egg" on one temple with an air of mingled triumph and despair. Such a soft little comforting neck to kiss, and such precious dimpled knees to bathe!

Jacky had followed her up the stairs. As she put on the baby's nightgown, she watched his cheeks with an appraising eye.

"Please throw away that horrible bread and sirup, Jacky! You know you mustn't eat it."

"It's good for me," he insisted, though regarding it with a listless eye.

"Now, Jacky, you know I'm not that sort of a mamma." It was an old joke between them about "foolish mammas." She would imitate an adoring parent saying that if her boy wanted candy and ice cream, he just must have it, and Jacky was invariably diverted.

"Show me," he demanded

She went through the impersonation. His little body shook with silent laughter, for her son had a true and piercing humor. The bread went out of the window, and Jacky came to her side.

"I'm glad you ain't a foolish mamma!" he said.

The baby was quiet and happy. Jacky leaned against her shoulder, preparing himself for a discussion. She felt the tension go out of his body as the flush died away. Something told her that the cook had not been kind, and the children had felt unguarded, perhaps a little afraid, while she had been walking in the garden with a serpent.

Yet the man's look came back to her. She knew that there was a magic spell upon them both—that just this once her feet might stray the delightful paths of dalliance, before middle age crept upon her.

She knew instinctively and positively that there would be no thought of real harm. The danger lay in the secret heartache that she must face after the episode had passed.

The June day was nearly over. A tender twilight dreamed outside her window. Once again twilight and new moon seemed made for her, and not merely as a background to life's haste and everlasting demands. Because of that look in a stranger's eyes, romance once more walked abroad, evoked by her laughter at his subtle flattery, by his joy in her laughter because he was understood.

As she sat alone, the sharp peal of the telephone brought her back to realities. Jack told her that he would not get home until a late train. The wide and easy paths of dalliance were made easy for her willing feet that evening!

Once more she glided upon the magic floor to the sound of flute and bassoon, her feet shod with the shoes of youth, and little fireworks of vanity exploding before her eyes, making her think that the whole world was ablaze.

Always he was unobtrusively at her side, to foresee every wish, to snatch her from the undesirable partner, to arrange for her leaving the ballroom with old Colonel Forbes, while he himself sauntered out for a smoke with a group of men. Circumstances all bowed to his artistry, and soon afterward Nan found herself on an unobserved corner of the porch, alone with him.

They discussed the dance, enjoying each other's summing up of the flapper and her dancing.

"When I was watching you," he observed, "dancing with one of those boys who dance so well, it made me think of those lines:

"To dance to lutes,  
To dance to flutes,  
Is delicate and rare."

"Ah!" she broke in, and finished the stanza:

"But 'tis not meet  
With trembling feet  
To dance upon the air!"

For a moment the situation hung between them, slightly stressed by the apt quotation. Then two men joined them, asking for a light, and Compton went off for matches, insisting upon leaving them for the errand. Nan knew it was her cue to return to the dancing with some one else,



instead of Compton; so, assuming a yawn, she begged to be taken back to her group.

She did not see Compton alone again, though he was ready to the moment with her wrap, which he put about her as if he was enveloping her with his adoration.

On the drive home, a friend remarked sleepily:

"Rather a stupid party, didn't you think, Nan?"

"Oh, no, I thought it *very* nice," responded Nan politely.

Safe at home, she looked at her own starry eyes in the glass, and murmured, smiling:

"Oh, yes, a *very* stupid party—for me!"

In the dark, she was happy. To-morrow held cakes and candles—no lessons, no duties. Somehow he would see her.

### III

As Nan guided her little car to a convenient corner near the courts, a tennis-clad figure rose from the Alsop group and in a casual, leisurely manner came toward her.

"When I was young, my best young man had to tie my horse for me when I arrived at tennis parties; but now it's easier—for the old gentlemen," remarked Nan, trying not to sound breathless.

"I've been sitting by the Alsop child," replied Compton, "and she certainly made me feel one of the old gentlemen you refer to. I've known her since she came out, and it seems to me she gets younger every minute." Once more he turned upon Nan the look, as he added: "Please don't join all those people! Please come and make me happy for just an hour or so. Let's sit over here, and they will think there wasn't room at the courts."

Nan obeyed him, moving with a casual air away from the crowd that was applauding the players in the tournament; but they were hardly seated when Sally Alsop ran toward them.

"Oh, Mr. Compton!" she cried. "They're ready for you over on the far court. It was the quickest set I ever saw!"

Without the slightest sign of disappointment, he rose, bowed, and left the two women. Nan realized that a gesture of annoyance on his part would have started gossip. Only his fine technique would make it possible to go on seeing him. Even as these thoughts flashed through her mind, Sally burst out:

"Oh, Mrs. Caperton, was he talking about me? Mother said he was discussing me with you at the Garden Club yesterday. What did he say? Do tell me! Oh, Mrs. Caperton, don't you think he's the most fascinating man in the world? When you were young, I suppose girls didn't come right out and say when they were in love with a man, but I don't mind telling you. I've been just a perfect fool over him since my coming out party!"

"But, Sally, I never saw you with him! And how about all your other beaux? Your mother told me—"

The girl turned a flushed, embarrassed face to Nan.

"What other beaux, Mrs. Caperton? There are a lot of boys at the house, of course—mother is always inviting some nice girl to visit me, or giving a party; but oh, Lord, it must be nice to have a man in love with you—real, honest-to-God *in love*! Then mother and I wouldn't have to be propping up these rag doll suitors of mine, and pretending I've got 'em when I really haven't!"

Nan was surprised. She was curious, too, to know what was the matter with pretty little Sally and her career; but, above all, she wanted to hear more of Compton.

"Don't all the girls have good times and flowers and candy and things?" she asked, leaning forward and looking into Sally's eager eyes.

"They have good times, I suppose," answered the girl; "but it is so hard to know what to do! Look at Marion Custis. When she first came out, the boys wouldn't dance with her because she wore too many clothes—sleeves, you know, and old-fashioned stuff like that; so Marion simply took off almost *everything*, and expected to have a gorgeous time. What do you suppose the boys said? Why, that they were ashamed to dance with her, because she didn't have on enough! So you never know!"

There was a silence as Nan dwelt gratefully on her own youth, and thought of her coming out, twelve years before, in a college town. She wondered how to get Sally back to the subject of Compton. Suddenly the girl spoke again:

"It's funny, Mrs. Caperton, Marion and I were talking about you yesterday, and both of us said we'd bet you used to have lots of *real* beaux. You look sort of fed up," she added thoughtfully, and with a

trace of awe. "Nobody ever sees you vamping some old fool for the sake of being seen with a man. And that's why I decided to talk to you about Elliot Compton," the girl went on, handspringing back to her usual subject, Sally Alsop. "I don't often do team work with mother, but for him I have. Sometimes he seems to like me a lot. He's lots older, you know, but he says I'm different from most *débutantes*. He looks at me and makes me feel—he makes me feel—"

The girl's voice died away, and in her softened face Nan read a tender memory of the look. She realized that Sally saw her future self—idealized, mature, complete—reflected in the fascinating eyes of the man she loved.

To the older woman there came the understanding that what his gaze had meant to herself was a revival of the youth she had already spent, of the romance she had already lived, and of a self that she had long since discarded for one to which she was suddenly glad to return.

"Sally," she said earnestly, "are you asking my advice?" At the girl's nod, she went on: "You are very pretty, and I can't understand in the least why you—why those proposals we all had so much faith in never came off; but don't talk like the other *débutantes*. Say what you think to Mr. Compton. He is the sort of man who—who knows women rather thoroughly. Don't try to be cleverer than he. Just be his honest little friend, and soon he'll be telling you about all the others." Nan rose as she finished, and added: "I see him coming back—to you. Now I'm going to get some tea!"

But Compton had timed his movements with hers so perfectly that she could not avoid being intercepted on her way to the tea table.

"We have been talking about you," she said, glancing back at Sally. "I don't blame you for saying that she gets younger every minute." With an envious sigh, she added: "A face as lovely as Sally's doesn't often go with so much character."

"But, Mrs. Caperton," interrupted the astonished man, for once thrown off his balance by her complete change of personality, "I've been longing to see you ever since—"

"Go along!" she broke in, tapping him vampishly on the arm. "You're a regular flatterer!"

For that moment Nan Caperton bravely appeared to her world as a man hunter. Then she sauntered past Compton, leaving him to join the pretty girl who had indeed discovered her future in his eyes.

#### IV

How cool and quiet seemed the nursery where Jacky lay waiting faithfully for his mother, his best beloved.

"I'm awful glad you've come!" he cried. "After the baby goes to sleep and Mary goes downstairs, I smell ghosts around this house. Father hasn't come; so it's a long time before you go down to dinner, and we can have a story party right now. Begin and tell about the little boy and the foolish mamma!"

So Nan told, while a whippoorwill called outside in the June dusk. Jacky grew quieter and quieter till she stopped. Then his little voice, steeped in content:

"I'm glad *you* ain't a foolish mamma!"

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#### AT MIDWAY HOUSE

At Midway House—say, thirty-five,  
When back of us lies eager youth,  
With all its glories still alive,  
And hope and strength still ours, forsooth—

At Midway House, when stretching on  
The fertile future beckons, "Come  
To fuller years than those now gone,  
To richer strains than those now dumb"—

At Midway House love fain would stay  
And let the days be always thus;  
But since we must be on the way,  
We bid love take the road with us.

William Wallace Whitelock

# The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY.

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

## XIX

**A**DHERING resolutely to the line of action he had mapped out, Linton did everything in his power to restore self-confidence and will-power to the broken man whom he had known as a brave soldier in the darkest days of the war. To begin with, he interested him in a menu, and persuaded him to begin the sating of a ravenous hunger by taking a plate of soup.

Singularly enough, the next thing Jenks asked for was a supply of cold beef and pickles. It did not occur to Linton until later that the poor fellow sought what was most quickly obtainable. He himself nibbled at a lobster salad, thinking he could thus conceal his own lack of appetite.

Though grudging each second of delay, and literally afire with the knowledge that here, at last, was one who might know something of the murderous schemes in which Lefèvre and his associates were engaged, he exerted himself to the utmost not only to conceal his own anxiety, but to allay his companion's. He succeeded so well that Jenks was soon talking freely of the "old days," and actually expressing the hope that there might be another war.

"A fellow knew where he was, then," he said, "and the government thought something of him."

At last, when the bill was paid, the two went out, and Linton hailed a taxi, saying, with smiling carelessness, that he had not heard yet where his rooms were situated, and would have to find out. It came about that Jenks was inside the quadrangle of New Scotland Yard before he recognized that ominous environment.

By this time, however, the precise mental process which Linton looked for had taken

place in the man's mind. He was back again in the friendly relationship of officer and private on active service. He felt, somehow, that the weight of British law and order was supporting instead of oppressing him. With the natural instincts of a sound-hearted outcast, who, after listening perforce to evil counsels, yet could not endure the knowledge that a girl who had befriended his mother should be in danger from schemes in which he was concerned, he rallied to a call which in reality he understood very much better.

"So I'm here, am I?" he said grimly, as he and his companion were halted by the constable on duty. "Well, fall in the escort, with fixed bayonets!"

"There is no escort, and no bayonets," Linton assured him. "I want you to meet one or two men higher up—that is all. I undertake that you will be free to go when you please. But, as a reasonable human being, you should ascertain first where certain rascals are leading you, and then decide whether you will throw in your lot with them or with us."

The message he sent to Mr. Winter secured a prompt summons to the chief's office. Furneaux and Sheldon were present also, and they had been busy, apparently, as the big table was littered with memoranda in orderly disorder.

Linton told his story with soldierlike brevity, and saw that the others were greatly impressed by its possibilities. He touched lightly on the absence of alcoholic refreshment during the meal, and the chief took the cue instantly. Rising, he unlocked a cupboard, and produced a bottle, a siphon, and a tumbler.

"I keep a small supply of liquor here for strictly medicinal purposes," he said

blandly. "You, Mr. Jenks, have been under the weather, so I prescribe a fair-sized dose, wel. diluted. Are you a smoker? Will you have a cigar, or do you prefer a pipe?"

"I'd like a cig, sir, if you have one," came the quite cheerful answer.

The chief did not indulge in cigarettes, but Sheldon proffered a well-filled case.

"Now, Jenks," went on Winter agreeably, with the air of one who had not a care in the world, "you have probably done yourself, as well as Miss Mainwaring, a good turn by your action this evening. Do you know what has been happening at Dorking? Have you seen the evening newspapers?"

Yes, the ex-soldier had picked one up in Piccadilly Circus, but had only suspected the connection between the Surrey contingent and those with whom he had been brought in contact in certain clubs and popular institutions where one got a bed cheaply.

"Somebody seems to have been firing off gas shells and Black Marias down there," he said, "but that's nothing to what is planned for London to-night. The government is goin' to be terrified, sir—that's what they said. We fellows, the under dogs, are not to make a move till we're taken off the leash—that's the way they put it—but to-night's show is meant to prove that the men behind the social revolution are in earnest."

"I take it you really have no notion what these people have in mind."

"Just a general bust-up—that's all I know. It may be the Houses of Parliament, or Westminster Abbey—these lads have a special down on the church—or some offices in Whitehall, or some big hotels, or all the lot, for what I know, but the idea is to scare the public and puzzle the police. I remember those very words being used."

"By whom?"

"By the chap Captain Linton and me met in the Strand to-night."

"Do you know his name?"

"Names were never used, sir. It was always 'a friend of the downtrodden.'"

"Did they ever give you any money, or food?"

"Precious little of either. We were to help ourselves when the smash came."

"What sort of smash?"

"The upset of the whole caboodle—law

courts, City, and West End. They mean it, too, guv'nor. All the houses are marked. I heard about Lord Copmanthorpe's place being on the first list, and, thinking it might be for to-night, I just had to go and tell that nice young lady to look after herself."

"What time to-night?"

"Eleven o'clock, some of our boys said, but I don't know who told them."

The chief glanced at a clock; at that moment the chimes of Big Ben came through an open window.

"If anything happens—" he began, but a telephone jarred at his elbow.

"Harrow Road police station," said a voice. "Sergeant Davies speaking. At ten fifty a taxicab traveling east along Praed Street, near St. Mary's Hospital, was blown to pieces. The explosion was tremendous, and was followed by a fire which resembled the action of an incendiary bomb. Three passers-by were killed, and several people are seriously injured. Fortunately, the driver of another taxi, making for Paddington, had just passed the vehicle which blew up, and he recognized the chauffeur as a man whom he knew. We are making inquiries, and will ring again if we ascertain anything further before midnight. Just now the street is blocked by thousands of people, which makes things difficult."

"Let us hear from you at any hour," said the chief. "Do you want help?"

"I think not, sir. Our special squad is on duty, as per to-day's general order."

"Good! Hold on a second."

Winter passed the phone to Linton.

"Give the best description you can supply of the fellow you saw outside the Strand Restaurant at a quarter past ten," he said, "and ask Sergeant Davies to circulate it at once, with direct and immediate reference to Paddington Station."

Linton complied, and the others did not fail to notice that Jenks was intensely interested. Winter nodded to Furneaux, who tackled the new witness in an undertone.

"I suppose you cannot tell us much more to-night that would be useful?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid not, mister," said Jenks. "The fact is, I'm dead tired. My mind won't work."

"I thought so. Now I will send for one of the men on night duty, who will take you to a room in a quiet street close by. To-morrow morning Inspector Sheldon will arrange for your breakfast to be brought



in at half past eight. If you will give him particulars, he will be with you before nine o'clock with a new rig from top to toe. That, plus a shave, will make a new man of you. Then he will accompany you here, and, if you are willing, you can work with another ex-soldier, under Captain Linton's orders. This will give you a fresh start in life, and hardly any one will recognize you when you are properly dressed; but—you must be with us body and soul. Will you do this?"

"Would a duck swim?" agreed Jenks with enthusiasm.

Linton could not help smiling as this latest recruit left the room.

"What are you grinning at?" squeaked the little man, during a pause, while Sergeant Davies was writing industriously at the other end of the wire.

"I hear my bed vanishing, and, of course, I couldn't call at the Rag," was the *sotto voce* answer.

"I don't care tuppence where *you* sleep," snapped Furneaux. "Probably at the Ritz, as you seem to fall on feathers and fine linen all the time. *Cré nom!* What luck to find Jenks! And all through that girl!"

"What luck to be able to sleep anywhere!" sighed the chief. "I seem to be in for an all-night session. This blow-up in Praed Street is the best thing yet. It promises really well. Who says that a policeman's lot is not a happy one? Doing constabulary duty beats the Grand Guignol melodramas sky high these days. Finished, Mr. Linton? Well, take that other phone, and see if your club can provide, though Heaven only knows what time you will turn in. If Jenks's information is correct, there may be more serious bangs in London tonight than this at Paddington. Didn't I say something about medicine? I imagine we can all do with a small revolver."

He staged four more glasses.

"Did you enjoy your after-dinner stroll with the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring?" inquired Furneaux, when Linton had booked a room at the Army and Navy Club.

The younger man suppressed the obvious question as to why he had been denied any real knowledge of the lady's identity.

"Yes," he said.

"Is that all you have to say? Not a word of thanks, for instance?"

"I nearly succeeded in making a fool of myself, if that is what you are anxious to know."

"Not at all. I took that for granted. Did she put you through the third degree when she discovered who you were?"

"Something of the kind. Certainly, she was not very communicative. I was in absolute ignorance of the fact that she was Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter until poor Jenks blurted it out, under compulsion, so to speak, from a gentleman named Dewar."

"Ha, Dewar! A genuine cop!" said Furneaux. "What a scream, that Detective Dewar should figure as the messenger of the gods!"

Linton actually blushed, whereupon the chief broke in.

"Pay no heed to this shrimp," he said.

"He means well, and don't forget that if you had known yesterday, or even to-day, what you know now, it is highly probable that events would have taken an entirely different course. You see that, don't you?"

"I—suppose so, sir," was the hesitating reply.

"Do you doubt it?" cackled Furneaux.

"Both you and she would have aired your best drawing-room manners, which are horribly out of place when police work is in full swing. But even if you were worried because you couldn't make love to an upper housemaid, no matter how charming she might be, you did devilish well in holding back so thoroughly at a moment when you must have wanted to leave Jenks and dash after the conspirator in the taxi. By the way, how did you learn to take in so much of his appearance at a glance? That touch about the brown silk tie and pearl pin was ultraprofessional."

Linton laughed.

"I was taught that trick by my father," he explained. "He held that a soldier should begin early to train his eye and his memory. When I was a small boy, he would allow me one glance at a shop window, and give me a penny for every object in it which I could name accurately afterward. I well remember collecting two bob outside an ironmonger's place."

"You'll be a loss to the profession when you collar that chief constableness," said Furneaux. "I am almost sorry Miss Peggy isn't lowly born. We might have kept you in the Yard. The girl herself may be willing, but her pa and ma will probably prove obdurate."

"Any more of this movie stuff will drive me crazy!" growled Winter, reaching for a cigar box.

He was interrupted by the telephone. It was Sergeant Davies again.

"I sent a man on a bicycle to Paddington Station," said the sergeant. "He reports that a gentleman who answers to every detail of the description supplied took a Gladstone bag out of the cloak room there about twenty minutes to eleven. He was in a great hurry, and carried it himself to a waiting taxi. It has also been ascertained that the driver of the cab was the poor chap killed in Praed Street ten minutes later."

"Why the delay?" inquired Winter sharply.

"What delay, sir?"

"Between the departure of the cab and the time of the explosion. There are fully five minutes unaccounted for. A taxi would reach St. Mary's Hospital in less than two minutes at that hour."

"I'll have further inquiries made, sir," said Harrow Road humbly.

It may be stated now that the owner of the bag wasted nearly five minutes while the taxi was still in the station. Some porters who saw him thought he was rearranging the bag's contents.

"I think I see light," cried Furneaux, propping his chin on both clenched fists, and resting his elbows on the table. "For some reason, possibly not unconnected with events at Dorking, to-night's demonstration was called off, literally at the eleventh hour. I shall not be surprised to learn that the cloak rooms of several important London termini were to be blown to smithereens at eleven o'clock. How easy—with clockwork machines! The scheme was postponed by orders from headquarters, the bags were withdrawn, and the mechanism of the bombs stopped. The man whom Linton saw must have fumbled his job, or the time indicator got slightly ahead of his calculations. I'll bet you a new hat, chief, that our men are now picking pieces of his respectably clad body off the shutters and doors of certain shop fronts in Praed Street. I do hope most sincerely that they find that pearl pin. It should be given to Linton as a keepsake."

"That, and a certain half crown," said Linton.

"Miss Mainwaring gets the half crown, if she wants it—which I very much doubt. The Dorking chemist is the rightful recipient. That photograph of his was a masterpiece. But we have a long way to go be-

fore we begin distributing souvenirs, and some of us may not be alive to claim them. I despise criminals, as a class, but this bunch of crooks is well organized, and directed by a real brain."

"What proof is there yet of any supernatural intelligence being at work?" put in Winter.

"Jenks! That these scoundrels' propaganda should have got down to Jenks and his like is the most significant fact laid bare thus far. I pay little heed to high explosives. Hundreds of thousands of people in Europe know the chemical formulae of all sorts of destructive agents, be they variants of T. N. T. or chlorine gases. The really dangerous thing is psychological knowledge, which enables those possessing it to play on the ignorance and prejudices of the multitude. The Jenkses of London and every other city in the world have only to gaze ferociously at the sleek men and expensively gowned women pouring out from the theaters at this hour, and hastening in costly limousines to restaurants and dancing clubs, to make them ready to believe the crazy nostrums offered them by so-called regenerators of the social system. That is the real peril—the world-wide powder magazine waiting to be fired by Lefèvre's squibs. I say most earnestly that unless we crush this fellow soon, the great war will be child's play as compared with the great collapse!"

## XX

NOTHING could have more weight with a listener like Linton, accustomed as he was becoming to Furneaux's flippancy and sarcastic humor, than the little man's real seriousness at this moment. Those few tumultuous words seemed to open an illimitable vista of ruin and terror and mob rule.

Winter, too, was impressed. He laid down a cigar that he was about to light.

"We are not wasting any time," he said slowly. "Considering that Lefèvre has worked with such secrecy and cunning, we have got on his track fairly well in twenty-four hours."

"We've had a lot of luck, with precious little divination. Oh, yes—that is my special job, and I've fallen down badly. For Heaven's sake, smoke, or I shall believe that the sky is falling."

Winter picked up the cigar again.

"Sorry you're so hipped," he cried, with a cheerfulness which, if assumed, was high-

ly creditable to his powers as an actor. "I'm puzzled, I admit, but not despondent. I have never yet seen a crank win his way by sheer force. He may succeed on the platform or in the press, or startle honest citizens by a book, but when it comes to a real fight between order and disorder, he is no more prepared to encounter the power of the law than a quacking duck can resist having its neck wrung at the appointed time. What do you say, Sheldon? You look at things differently from the rest of us. What is your opinion?"

The junior detective was inured to jokes about the peculiar difference in size between his right eye, which was large, and his left eye, which was small.

"I have at least the benefit of two points of view, sir," he said with a smile; "so, while agreeing with Mr. Furneaux that there has been an almost phenomenal element of luck in our investigations thus far, I cannot help remembering that something of the kind takes place in connection with every big affair we tackle. That is only the beginning, however. Then our resources and experience come into the scale. You ask what I think of this business. I think Mr. Furneaux and you should be in bed as quickly as you can get there. You're worn out. You've had a long day, and there may be a still longer one in front of you tomorrow. I can remain here till two o'clock, and will leave a memorandum of anything that turns up."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" cried the chief, rising. "My own impression is that Lefèvre and his crew are scared, and will lie low for a time, believing we shall be lulled into forgetfulness. Those fellows always hug that silly notion. I'll bet you a new hat, Furneaux, there isn't another explosion for a week."

"Done—although I should be glad to have to pay for a new cover for your massive cranium."

The blinds were not drawn, and the windows were open. Winter, who happened to be facing that way, and Furneaux and Linton, seated with their backs to the door, saw a vivid burst of light leap into the sky over South London. Soon came a sullen boom which rattled the window panes.

"Talking about new hats!" chortled Furneaux.

"Now I'll believe that Nero did really fiddle while Rome burned!" shouted the chief angrily.

"That bang took place about a mile and a half away," announced Linton.

"Bed!" roared Winter derisively, glaring at Sheldon as if he were in some sense responsible for the latest development. "I can see myself in bed about Christmas time if this sort of thing goes on!"

"Shall I call Kennington Park Road, sir?" inquired Sheldon.

"What's the use? Wait till we hear from them. Are you sure about the distance, Linton?"

"Yes, sir. I counted the seconds between the flash and the sound."

"Then it cannot be Waterloo, and London Bridge is a long way to the eastward. There is no important station in that direction. Perhaps these devils have blown themselves up!"

The telephone rang.

"The chief commissioner, of course," said Winter. "By Jove, he's quick on the trigger!"

The instrument in use happened to be near Furneaux, who took off the receiver. He handed it, with a grin, to Linton.

"A lady on the wire," he said.

It was Peggy. She was distressed but apologetic.

"I do hope I am not interfering at an awkward moment," she said; "but a little while ago I was seated at my bedroom window, looking out into the street, and thinking over my day's adventures, when I saw a blaze of light beyond the Marble Arch. I know it was beyond, because the arch itself was silhouetted against it. Then came a bang. Soon afterward two men appeared in our street, but ran away when some one—I think it was the detective who grabbed Jenks—challenged them. They were stopped by some policemen a little farther on, and there was a fight, but I am sure they were captured quickly. I felt I had to ring up and tell some one. While waiting at the phone, I heard another bang. I cannot tell you how relieved I am to hear your voice."

"Please don't be alarmed, Miss Mainwaring," said Linton quietly. "Such skirmishes only reveal the enemy's position. The mere fact that those men were arrested in the street shows that you may sleep in safety."

"As it is you speaking, I want to apologize for my horrid behavior to-day."

"What have you done that calls for apology?"



"Misleading you the way I did; but I was terrified of figuring in the newspapers."

"Line wanted!" broke in a voice, and the circuit was broken forthwith.

There were two phones in the room, and both were in demand. Winter took the commissioner's call, and Furneaux that from Kennington Park Road police station. The inspector in charge there announced that a storage warehouse in South London had been wrecked by an explosion, and was completely destroyed by an extraordinarily fierce fire which followed. Two night watchmen were assumed to have been killed, but, so far as was known, there were no other casualties, though many people in the neighborhood complained of shock. The fire brigade was powerless to save any part of the warehouse, but was protecting adjoining property. Deponent thought the affair resembled the operations of the gang concerning which a general order had been issued that day.

Furneaux thanked him, and said that his opinion would be communicated to the commissioner without a moment's delay—which was true enough, if not in the sense understood by the gratified inspector.

The next call came from Vine Street, to inform headquarters that two men, charged with "loitering" in Curzon Street, had resisted arrest. Nothing of a suspicious nature was found on them when searched, but they refused to give names or addresses, and had therefore been locked up.

Furneaux sprang from his chair.

"I'll see those lads to-night," he said. "This is one of the occasions when one longs for the full and free use of the torture chamber in the Tower. *Au revoir sans adieux!* Meet you all at half past nine in the morning—perhaps!"

"You be off, too!" cried Winter to Linton and Sheldon. "I'll sleep here. The newspapers will soon be on the job. Don't forget, Sheldon, that you have to look after Jenks early to-morrow. Be sure to do him well! As usual, Furneaux is right. Jenks has suddenly become the nerve center of our activities."

## XXI

SHELDON had rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue, so Linton walked with him up Whitehall, after sending his bag in a taxi to the Army and Navy Club. The after-theater rush of traffic had practically ended, and the spacious street—in many ways the most

dignified thoroughfare in London—was empty enough to reveal the placid beauty of its varied architecture.

The government offices on the west side were impressive in the half light of a June evening. They bore the guise of solid purpose, and seemed to represent the power and majesty of Britain. It was almost impossible to believe that the stage thunder of a coterie of crazy theorists could lay in ruins not only these stately buildings, but all that they stood for.

Linton said something of this to his companion, of whom he knew nothing save that he was evidently a trusted associate of both Winter and Furneaux.

"I wouldn't have had the slightest hesitation in agreeing with you before the war," commented Sheldon thoughtfully. "To-day I am not so sure. I think we are passing through a transition period. Unknown forces have been let loose, and, whether we like it or not, they will direct our public life into new channels. If our people retain their traditional common sense, all will be well. If they yield to hysteria—and they are perilously near the border line just now—we may still survive as a nation, but there will be some remarkable changes in the British temperament. I am certain of one thing—we, in our time, will never again see the contented and prosperous England of 1914."

"But change is inevitable. Surely the future of the British Empire is not at the mercy of fanatics like Lefèvre!"

"Not if we can make people understand the real danger of the situation. If Russia, eight years ago, could have visualized her condition to-day, the revolution, even if it broke out, must have followed a very different course. That is the trouble. Political and economic experiments often produce unforeseen and lamentable results, but it's a deuce of a job to get their advocates to admit the fact and mend their ways."

"So you share Mr. Furneaux's rather disconcerting pessimism?"

"One never knows what Furneaux actually has at the back of his head. For one thing, quicksilver, not red blood, runs in his veins. For another, he is a creature of impulse, and just now he is thoroughly annoyed because he has failed so far to arrive at some extraordinarily acute bit of inductive reasoning which would reveal who Lefèvre actually is, and what he is



aiming at. Of course, we can all of us fall back on communistic shibboleths; but Furneaux believes, and I agree with him, that this particular gang is working on a definite program. I tell you candidly that in my opinion we are up against something new and startling in the methods of the social revolution."

"But you yourself said that you were satisfied with the progress made by the department in one complete day. Our inquiry literally began with the stabbing of Foster last night."

"I am satisfied, yet I hate to see Furneaux unsettled. For instance, any other man, and he himself on any other occasion, would have crowed over the confirmation of his snake theory to-night, but he let it go by as of no importance."

"What's this about the snake? I haven't heard."

"Ah, I forgot! You put us all on a new scent when you produced Jenks, though, oddly enough, it was just the appearance of Jenks which unsettled the little man more than anything else. His disturbance at finding that Lefèvre's teachings had reached Jenks and his class was no make-believe. There are millions of Jenkses, you know. That is why Furneaux hurried off to interview the two fellows who were grabbed in Curzon Street. But—about the snake. Some one unknown—a man not answering in any respect to Lefèvre's description—called at a naturalist's shop in the Old Brompton Road long after closing hours last night. He bought a common green snake—a perfectly harmless creature—and took it away in a black box exactly similar to the one you saw on the table in the Dorking house. By the way, a call came through from Charing Cross about eight o'clock this evening for Ruffini at Mr. Thistleton's place. The policeman on duty there said that Ruffini was not in, but he would deliver any message. The inquirer, a foreigner, who spoke English well, asked if Ruffini had gone to London as arranged, and the policeman answered that he had not, but was probably engaged with the head gardener, the drought having rendered it necessary to water the flower beds thoroughly to-night. The voice requested him to tell Ruffini not to travel to town at all this evening, as the theatrical performance was postponed until this day week, or even later. Of course, the call came from a public telephone office."

"So that is why Mr. Winter was so ready to wager a new hat?"

"Possibly. However, Furneaux knew all about it when he took the bet. The chief almost keeps him in new hats. I believe he does it purposely, just to find out what really is in his mind."

"All the same, I'm convinced that Furneaux won by mere chance."

"Why?"

"An explosion in a storage warehouse! What an absurd setting for a tragic occurrence meant to shock England, to say nothing of worrying the police!"

"But suppose it was intended to destroy evidence? Lefèvre knows we are on his track, and, it may be, not so far off the true line as we ourselves imagine. That is a feature of this affair. Destruction, complete annihilation—these are the things aimed at, and secured, too. There doesn't appear to be a shred of anything left in Avenue House which offers a clew. Well, you cross the road here. Good night! We may be wiser this time to-morrow."

Next morning Linton telephoned Curzon Street, as arranged. Miss Peggy announced that she had slept like a top, once her head reached the pillow.

"But," she went on, "I want to know at once, please, whether you are speaking from Scotland Yard or from some place where no one has authority to cut me off without a word of explanation."

"This time you are secured from interruption," he replied, laughing. "I am talking from my club."

"Well, wouldn't any one be annoyed by such treatment? This is the second time it has happened."

"If you knew the excuse on each occasion you would pardon us, Miss Mainwaring. Last night, especially, we were throbbing with excitement."

"Can you tell me anything?"

"Not publicly."

"Will you lunch here, or come to tea?"

"May I phone you later? Surely Providence will be kind, and permit me to keep one fixture or the other!"

"I'm awfully excited. Is there any real news?"

"Lots, though not what you and I want most to hear."

"I don't quite get that."

"Well, our efforts can have only one successful outcome—the capture of certain persons."

"Oh, that would spoil everything!"

"I fear the telephone is now affecting my intelligence, for I don't understand that remark."

"Isn't it clear that as soon as the chase ends, I revert into a perfectly normal young person?"

"I see now! Unfortunately, the death roll is mounting rapidly."

Peggy was regretful, and said so.

"I know I mustn't ask any questions," she declared. "I'll curb my curiosity till you arrive; but do tell me one thing—will there be any interesting paragraphs in the early editions of the evening newspapers?"

"Undoubtedly. There are two important items in this morning's press—the taxicab incident in Praed Street, which you witnessed, in a sense, and the explosion in South London, which you heard. Read these in the light of your own knowledge, and you will guess a good deal."

"Don't go yet, I implore you! What became of Jenks?"

"He is well, and happy, I hope. I am now about to meet him. Not another word dare I utter, or you will be sure to use other names."

"How delightfully mysterious! I shan't stir out of the house till you phone, so please remember that you are keeping me interned on a lovely day."

"I take it, of course, that you are not going to Scotland?"

"How stupid of me! That is the first thing I meant to tell you. My people are coming to town by the night mail. I shall be in London for weeks."

Quite regretfully, Linton broke off the conversation—not that he lacked words. The trouble was that he might not utter them. He had taken thought during the cold light of early morning, when the events of life, even its waking dreams, lose a good deal of the glamour that they borrow from evening shadows.

It would have been difficult enough to disrupt all his material prospects so that he might not only marry a girl chosen from the wage-earning class, but might live happily with her. The social distinctions set up in Mayfair were just as potent as those that obtain in Bermondsey. The daughter of a wealthy peer, one already marked out for the high places of political preferment, was nearly as far out of reach for a young chief constable of police as the said young chief constable for a housemaid!

"This will never do!" he told himself, lighting the first pipe of the day. "I really ought not to go to either luncheon or tea."

He ended by going to both—an unlooked-for development which came about in the most natural way.

When he reached Scotland Yard, shortly before ten o'clock, he met a rejuvenated Jenks and a spruce Blenkey. Though awed by their surroundings, the two men were conscious of being distinctly removed from the common order of mankind, inasmuch as, each in his own way, they had an inner and peculiar knowledge of the sensational stories anent Lefèvre and his gang published in the morning newspapers. The ingenuity of modern journalism had not failed to connect the series of crimes which had occurred the previous day, while disclaimers from a bank and a firm of well known stockbrokers, stating that they had no client of the name of "Lefèvre," focused public attention on the amazing person who owned a large house and yet had contrived to destroy it so thoroughly.

Ruffini's arrest was known, too, as well as the scuffle in Curzon Street, "outside the Home Secretary's London residence." One adroit writer, remembering that a man was under remand for purveying a new and exceedingly harmful drug, went into a detailed description of certain phases of the night life of London, and stated categorically that the continental squad of the C. I. D. was particularly active at the moment in its surveillance of the most noted members of the underworld, both men and women.

Sir Arthur Monson and Mr. Winter were thoroughly annoyed when they read this effusion. It was altogether too clever an assumption, for none of the officials conducting the inquiry would breathe a word as to departmental methods to any one connected with the press.

"We cannot guard against this sort of thing, Sir Arthur," said the chief resignedly. "These young gentlemen attend the law courts, and remember how and when certain evidence has been obtained. Though the exact system employed to get it, or the actual source whence it came, may be concealed, they ferret out some of the facts, often from the prisoner when released. All these things are on record in a newspaper's 'library,' where your biography and mine are already written up, ready for instant use if one or other of us

retires, or meets a sudden and violent death."

"In this case, wouldn't it be wise to enlist the aid of the press?" mused the commissioner aloud.

"You mean in relation to the facts still withheld?"

"Well, yes. How about a photograph of a 'token,' for instance?"

"Furieux, who telephoned early to say that he may not put in an appearance today, is dead against any reference to the numbered half crowns."

"But Lefèvre and his crew know that we know?"

"Yes, sir—I admit it; but when Furieux makes a special request—"

The commissioner laughed.

"Oh, of course," he said. "We just have to do as we're told. Very well! Let us discuss this point fully when he does turn up. Have you any notion as to what he is doing?"

"He wants to roam about in disguise. Probably I shall pass him in the street; but he can get hold of us quickly enough, if necessary."

Linton, with his two assistants, was instructed to stroll through the main thoroughfares of the West End, and to keep a sharp lookout for those members of the gang whom they knew by sight. The exigencies of the public service forbid an exact description of the way in which the patrol was conducted, or the signals they could adopt when coöperation was called for. However, no such intimate details of detective methods is essential, since that which actually happened was far removed from the rôle allotted to the trio.

## XXII

AT noon, when Linton was in two minds as to whether he should telephone Curzon Street at all, and, if he did, whether or not he ought to lunch there, he was standing, by arrangement, in front of a popular restaurant near Oxford Circus when a wizened old man, of poverty-stricken appearance, asked him to buy a box of matches. The request was made in the husky accents of the born cockney, but he chanced to glance at the would-be vendor's eyes, and caught a gleam in them that was curiously reminiscent of some one he knew.

Thereupon the voice changed suddenly.

"Excellent!" it cackled. "You have all the makings of a first-rate cop! Listen,

and treasure each word. Take that girl out to lunch. Then persuade her to go with you to a private show of a new picture called 'The Volcano' in a theater near the Strand, at half past two. Ask for two seats at the door in the name of Mr. Zedyx—X. Y. Z. backward—and they will be given to you. Look at the picture, but don't discuss it in the theater except with high approval. No matter whom you may see there, or what you may imagine, do nothing whatsoever till you hear from me at the main exit about four o'clock. Tell Jenks and Blenkey to meet you there, too, and close in behind Miss Mainwaring. She will be quite safe, but, if they look after her only, both you and they will know whom to hit if a row starts. If nothing happens, rush the young lady home, and be at the Yard at five o'clock. In case, don't leave her for a yard or a second. Got all that?"

"Yes."

"Then buy a box of matches, and be off."

"As it happens, I am invited to luncheon at Curzon Street."

"Splendid! On your way take a look at St. George's, Hanover Square. It's an ugly but most interesting ecclesiastical edifice."

Linton's well ordered brain was so intent on memorizing Furieux's instructions, thus insuring their exact fulfillment, that he did not grasp the meaning of the concluding words until he was, in actual fact, gazing at the gaunt exterior of the church in which many of London's fashionable marriages are solemnized. Then he smiled at the conceit, though, truth to tell, he was by no means pleased at the prospect of involving the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring in anything like a "row," howsoever harmless it might be to her personally.

He believed that to the little detective the chase was the thing, no matter who suffered before the quarry was run to earth. Why bring the girl into it? Was there not proof in plenty that the wretches they were pursuing had no shred of mercy in their methods, and would sacrifice a whole theaterful of people if by so doing they could attain their own ends?

He had been taken by surprise in Oxford Circus. Could he possibly have found Furieux again, he would have refused point-blank to include Miss Mainwaring in the afternoon's program. It was too late to act now. His last glimpse of Furieux



showed the match seller hobbling with decrepit steps into a tube station. At any rate, Linton resolved firmly to act as he thought fit if there was the slightest sign of possible danger to his companion at the cinema performance.

In Bond Street he overtook two men of the continental squad at intervals of forty yards, but, as neither seemed to see him, he, also, looked elsewhere. He could not help wondering why they were sauntering so aimlessly through the well dressed throng which filled the narrow sidewalks at that hour.

Being, as it were, more than ordinarily on the *qui vive*, he noticed, turning into a manicure establishment, a woman whom he associated dimly with his recollections of the housekeeper who did the marketing for Avenue House, Dorking. Should he tell the other men of his suspicion? He halted and glanced back, whereupon the nearest detective smiled and waved him on with a single finger.

So, then, things were moving! That was satisfactory, at least.

It was amusing to note how Mr. Hobbs eyed him, and with what instant decision the butler classified him as belonging to the right set. And the seal was placed at once on an expert's judgment when Linton entered the drawing-room, because Lord Robert Ferris came forward with extended hand, and a hearty—

"Never more surprised in my life, old bean, than when Peggy told me you were coming here to-day. I didn't even know you had ever met the child."

Linton, full to the chin with hopes and fears, could not begin to guess to what extent, if any, the guardsman shared Peggy Mainwaring's fairly ample acquaintance with the topic of the hour. To make matters more difficult, she was not present.

"My meeting with the young lady in question is quite recent in date, and altogether official," he said. "You, as an old friend of the family, have already realized what a pity it is that she should be mixed up in this present excitement."

"Well, yes; but it's something big, I'm told—mines going up in all directions, and incendiary bombs dropping down chimneys, and that sort of thing. It became serious when my battalion was put on a service footing this morning, with one platoon in each company ready to turn out at a moment's notice."

"So the scare has reached the War Office?" said Linton, trying to find some noncommittal comment.

"Yes. I had a deuce of a job to get off this afternoon, but some johnnie in Scotland Yard passed the cheery word to my O. C., and here I am."

At that moment Peggy herself hurried in, brimful of regret for being late.

"Am I dressed properly for a cinema?" she said. "I'm told that Bobby and you are taking me to see some wonderful film, but what's the use of putting on specially glad rags when the whole show is given in the dark?"

"We are rather at cross purposes, Miss Mainwaring," said Linton. "Who told you of a visit to a cinema? I had an idea that the festivity, if it is one, was planned by one man only, and that knowledge of it would be confined to a very small circle."

"Oh, Mr. Furneaux said nothing about that. I told him Bobby was joining us for lunch, and he said you could get three tickets as easily as two."

"I shall not be in the least surprised if it turns out that 'The Volcano' is written and produced by Mr. Charles François Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department. However, he has taken a load off my mind, for I have been more than doubtful whether you ought to go."

"Dash it all!" cried Ferris. "Is Miss Mainwaring running any risk?"

"There is always a chance of such a thing."

"My notion is that some one in Scotland Yard is suffering from a bad attack of nerves," said the guardsman.

"I have not seen any indication of it," was Linton's dry answer.

"Luncheon is ready. I'm sure we're all hungry. After a hefty meal even a volcano won't seem so terrifying!"

Thus Peggy, who dreaded lest Linton might succeed in persuading the other man that she should not be permitted to accompany them to the theater.

"Didn't you say that the detective person wanted your opinion about the propagandist effect of this film?" went on Lord Robert, when they were seated at the dining table.

"Yes," replied Peggy. "He believed I knew so much more about M. Lefèvre's theories than the general public that I should be able to judge how far it might be mischievous."



"Well, that's all right. Don't you agree, Linton?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The truth is that Mr. Furneaux has enlightened Miss Mainwaring rather thoroughly. I was merely given orders, and am carrying them out."

From that instant Linton stifled his doubts. He asked no more questions. Not till long afterward did he learn that Furneaux had pulled the different strings which brought him to the private view of "The Volcano" in company with Peggy and Lord Robert. If the little detective ever wishes to change his profession, he can always earn a competence by manipulating marionettes. On that summer's day in London, his tiny frame and superactive brain were controlling the movements, and even the destinies, of a great many human lay figures.

There was nothing out of the common in the manners or appearance of the crowd that gathered for the private view of "The Volcano." Such a fixture, in the screen world, somewhat resembles a *répétition générale* on the legitimate stage, though the picture, of course, is seen exactly as it will be presented to the public at a later date.

The box office raised no difficulty about the additional seat. Indeed, Linton noticed that the businesslike young woman in charge did not so much as look at him when he mentioned "Mr. Zedyx." They were shown to places in the front row of the gallery—the best possible position, in fact—and, after an orchestral selection of modern Russian music, the lights went out, and the title and other preliminary announcements of the forthcoming piece flickered into brilliance.

"The Volcano" was announced as "an allegory," and the audience was not left in doubt for many minutes as to the nature of the message it conveyed. Our gray old world had been torn asunder so many times already to bring about modern conditions, and the results were so poor, it would seem, that an even greater catastrophe than any yet achieved by volcanic or seismic action—these were akin, it was held—was necessary before the millennium could arrive.

Some thrilling scenes of Etna in eruption were sandwiched between large-type condemnations of society as at present constituted. By devices which Linton could not begin to explain, busy towns and smiling villages were swallowed up by subterranean fires which one had seen gathering volume

and fury in the bowels of the earth. Similarly, crowds of diners in fashionable open-air restaurants, the occupants of grand stands on race courses, people entering the Casino at Monte Carlo, and promenaders on the sea front at Deauville—all genuine pictures these, taken in vivid sunshine—were blown into nothingness by the efforts of certain "reformers" who worked secretly in underground dungeons.

Out of a bewildering chaos there soon appeared a new and convincing sequence of events. Just as surely as unseen earth forces broke a whole city into fragments, so did modern civilization melt before the lava stream of what was called the "new freedom" among the nations. A royal procession faded into a march of the unemployed. The glitter of ill earned wealth was replaced by the poverty from which it was wrung. Let any man be rich and honored, he was surely doomed to destruction. Let him be hungry and in rags, he was proclaimed the avenger.

Certain characters, male and female, became recognizable types. The spectator followed the struggle between capital and labor, the representatives of worn-out "laws" and of new social "agreements," with the same breathless interest that a movie audience shows in a race between an express train and a motor car hurrying deadly rivals to the ultimate crash. The inevitableness of the outcome was a striking feature of the performance, which ended as it began, with Etna in convulsion, and with a new Sicily of pretty houses, tenanted by rather scantily clothed human beings, rising in glory out of the ruins.

When the lights were switched on again, a gasp of relief came from the crowded house, and a buzz of excited conversation broke out. Lord Robert Ferris momentarily forgot the embargo placed on disapproving comment, and turned to Peggy Mainwaring with a guffaw, half of anger and half of amusement.

"What frightful tosh!" he cried.

Peggy kicked his ankle.

"Not at all," she said. "It's an awfully clever picture. I want to see it again, heaps of times. I'm sure I missed a lot of minor effects of the utmost subtlety because the main story gripped my attention so closely."

Linton, who had followed the whole production with rapt interest, being convinced that what he was witnessing was a most

powerful exposition of M. Lefèvre's pet schemes—in several instances he recognized the definite characteristics of the explosives and fiery gases used—brought his wits back to the instant demand on them.

"You go in front," he muttered to Ferris, as they all three emerged into a crowded gangway. "Keep close to Lord Robert," he added to Peggy. "Don't get separated from him by any one, even if you have to use your elbows. I'll assist, so don't be surprised if I propel you onward with some force."

However, no one interfered with them in any way. The entrance hall was packed, of course, as everybody knows almost every other body in a professional crowd, and loud-voiced opinions concerning the film were alternating with hasty arrangements for impromptu tea parties in neighboring restaurants.

It was a relief to breathe fresh air and see daylight once more.

"Ah!" sighed Peggy, erring in her turn. "This is good! The blessed sunshine drives that horrid volcano out of one's mind!"

Linton saw Jenks and Blenkey near the exit, each taking his job rather seriously, and staring hard at the crowd pouring into the street. They were only looking for Miss Mainwaring and himself, but their steadfast scrutiny seemed to disconcert three men crossing the pavement to a waiting limousine. Linton, suddenly aware that he recognized the walk of two members of the trio, was sorely tempted to dash forward, in total disregard of Furneaux's explicit orders.

Fortunately, he was saved from this unpardonable offense.

The two ex-soldiers, wholly unmindful of their own definite job, exchanged glances and probably words of fiery comprehension, but were so taken by surprise that the three men were inside the car before they sprang at the door with a shout. Blenkey grabbed the handle; but as the car leaped into movement, he reeled back with a dagger thrust through his throat.

"Oh, what is it?" wailed Peggy, who had not failed to notice the actions of her waiting escort.

Linton, trying to convert his two eyes into twenty, shielding her with his body, and holding himself tense for a spring if necessary, whispered over her shoulder:

"I think Lefèvre is in that car, and he

may have got away, all because those fellows did not do just as they were told, and no more!"

### XXIII

MEN were shouting and women screaming, for fifty people at least had witnessed the scurry, and Blenkey, after nearly collapsing, was stanching with a handkerchief the flow of blood from his wound. There had been a sufficiency of black and white gore inside the theater, but this external episode showed the genuine article rather copiously.

A hubbub of loud-voiced orders and revolver shots broke out in the direction whither the car had fled, whereupon the crowd dissolved, some to see what was taking place farther up the street, most to seek safety in flight, and a few to remain where they were, because a number of women fainted outright when the shooting began.

Linton literally could not determine how to act. Every fiber in his body was drawing him to the invisible battle being waged at a little distance, but the iron bonds of discipline kept him immovable. He was not to quit Peggy's side. He was to do nothing whatsoever till he heard from Furneaux at the main exit. It was an odd moment for such a thought, but the fire raging in heart and brain reminded him of the pent-up volcano of the picture.

Peggy, thoroughly frightened by Blenkey's ghastly aspect, was clinging to Linton's left arm, and brokenly asking for an explanation which he could not give. Lord Robert Ferris was torn between annoyance at the girl's obvious confidence that Linton would shield her from harm and a natural desire to find out "what all the bally row was about."

At that moment a strident American voice came from the doorway.

"Gee! So this is London! Puts me right back into little old Noo York!"

"Guess some crooks are shooting up the burg," agreed another voice.

"Wonder if it's an advertising stunt for 'The Volcano,'" said the first speaker.

"Nit! They won't stand for that sort of thing over here. And real lead is flying. Look at that!"

"That" was a plate glass window across the street starred by a stray bullet.

Then Furneaux appeared, natty as ever, in blue serge suit, straw hat, brown shoes, with shirt, collar, tie, and socks in comple-

mentary shades. First he pounced on Jenks, who was supplying Blenkey with a second handkerchief.

"Take him to Charing Cross Hospital," he hissed, "and get the house surgeon to conceal him with sticking plaster. Then, if the doctor decides to cut the throats of both of you, he will rid the world of a pair of idiots. You've spoiled a neat thing!"

He whirled round on Linton.

"Glad to see that you, at any rate, have stuck to your guns. Hop it, quick! You'll find a taxi opposite the Savoy, or nearer. Be at headquarters at five sharp."

Peggy began to recover, and, of course, to expostulate because she was hurried away; but the men were obdurate. It was impossible to determine what had taken place during the shooting affray. Thousands of people blocked the street in that direction, and were yielding slowly to the pressure of a dozen mounted police. This was a sure signal of the end of the disturbance. In a few minutes the regular flow of traffic would be resumed.

So it came to pass that Linton swallowed a cup of tea in Curzon Street and hurried away, after promising by all his gods to telephone Miss Mainwaring at the earliest possible moment.

He reached New Scotland Yard at the appointed time, and was greatly impressed by the undisturbed calm that reigned in its courtyard. There was not the slightest sign of any activity out of the common. It is normally a quiet place in the afternoon, and on this occasion its repose was only enhanced by the presence of a couple of private cars, one of which Linton recognized as the chief's.

He was halted at the entrance, and his explanation that he was bidden to attend a "conference" was coldly received.

"Take a seat in the waiting room, sir," said a stolid constable. "I'll call you when Mr. Winter gives permission."

For a few seconds Linton was angry. Then he laughed. Was it not just that quality of British phlegm which had given England her place in the world? Sheldon came to his aid, however. A number of journalists gathered in the room were panting like hounds on a leash, and Sheldon looked in to say that the chief would see them at half past five exactly. He crooked a finger at Linton.

"Sorry you were held up," he said, as they passed along a corridor to the lift.

"It can't be helped. Everybody who comes here tries to bluff the doorkeeper, so, if the prime minister himself should call, he would be pushed into the waiting room."

In the chief's office were gathered Sir Arthur Monson, Furneaux, two members of the continental squad, Winter himself, and a man and woman, the former handcuffed. The moment Linton entered, he knew that the companion of "*mon vieux*" at Box Hill and the housekeeper at Avenue House were accounted for.

Mr. Winter looked up from a sheet of foolscap on which he was writing.

"Ah, Inspector Linton!" he said, in an oddly matter-of-fact way. "Have you seen either or both of these people before?"

In equally official tones Linton told where and when he *had* seen them.

Winter gazed sternly at the prisoners.

"Georg Moskovitch and Erminia Schwartz," he said, "you are charged, individually and collectively, with being engaged in a conspiracy against the state which has resulted in the murder of many innocent people and the destruction of property by explosives and incendiarism. There will be other charges against both of you, when the evidence in our possession is considered and sifted. It is my duty now to warn you that anything you may say in answer to the present charges will be taken down in writing, and may be used in evidence against you on your trial. Do you wish to make any statement?"

"No," growled the man.

The woman yielded suddenly to hysteria, and protested in broken English that she was only a servant. Winter touched a bell. When a constable came, he told him to have the pair taken separately to Bow Street, and gave him a written memorandum of the entries for the charge sheet.

"And now," said the chief commissioner, rising from his chair with a jerk when the closing of an outer door had cut off Erminia Schwartz's lamentations, "I would like to hear what has really happened."

He spoke like one who was not only irritated but nervous. Winter seemed to pay no heed to the great man's displeasure. He merely nodded at Furneaux.

"The story is yours, Charles," he said. "Tell it."

Furneaux leaned forward in his chair.

"I wish you'd smoke," he cried, as if in vexation. "The atmosphere is artificial



unless you are poisoning the air with one of your vile Havanas!"

Sir Arthur wriggled, but controlled himself. He even took a cigar from the box proffered by Winter. Sheldon was a cigarette smoker. The others preferred their pipes.

The two windows were wide open. From the Embankment came the rattle of the London County Council tram cars and the whirl of many taxis. London was going homeward from the city. What earthly chance, thought Linton, had Lefèvre and his fellow murderers of disturbing the poise of a people who remained so blandly indifferent alike to the wild tenets of the revolutionaries and the ghastly fate which threatened them?

"In this affair," began the diminutive speaker, "we've had so much good luck that we should not be surprised at to-day's hitch. Good luck! *'Cré nom!* Hundreds, it may be thousands, might have died if Miss Mainwaring hadn't spotted that half crown rolling across the road, if Mr. Linton had failed to discover the Dorking rendezvous, if he hadn't brought Jenks here last night, and, above all, if two of the unwashed had not gone to Curzon Street at eleven o'clock to see Lord Copmanthorpe's house blown sky high. I interviewed those warriors in Vine Street about midnight, and found that one of them had been a stage carpenter in a motion-picture studio—the very place where 'The Volcano' was made, or put together, for many of its best effects were bought from the film library of one of the great topical companies. That gave me the first definite pointer to the prospective whereabouts of the man whom we knew as M. Lefèvre, because the manager of the studio, a very decent fellow, who had dismissed the gentleman in Vine Street for drunkenness, assured me that the person who ordered and paid for the picture meant to attend the private view, being greatly concerned as to its effect on a professional audience. He, the said manager, was not altogether gratified by his association with the production. He regarded it as a dangerous undertaking, and fully expected its condemnation by the censor of films. I lay stress on this, because the more I heard of the matter about nine o'clock this morning, the more convinced I was that Lefèvre had a finger in the pie. I used Mr. Linton's description of *'mon vieux,'* and the studio man recognized it at once."

He paused, perhaps purposely, and Linton ventured to break in.

"The description was really due to Miss Mainwaring's close observation," he said.

"Yes," agreed Furneaux. "That girl is certainly a marvel!"

Linton colored a little at that, and resolved to hold his tongue unless specifically appealed to.

"The Home Office analyst, however, was the man who actually revealed M. Lefèvre's identity, though he himself is not aware of the fact yet," went on the detective. "I saw him at half past nine, while he was breakfasting, and he told me that the analysis of the drug purveyed by 'the doctor,' samples of which were already in our possession, had puzzled the laboratory experts. It was not a preparation of coal tar, but was rather suggestive of the synthesis of conine, from formaldehyde and ammonia under the action of light, indicating the way in which these alkaloids are formed in living plants. If some unknown catalyst were discovered, the process of manufacture by artificial light and heat would be comparatively simple."

"What might a catalyst be?" inquired Sir Arthur.

"I haven't the least notion, sir. I've had no time to look in the dictionary."

Linton thought he might take another chance.

"It is a chemical agent which, without undergoing any change itself, induces chemical change in other bodies," he said.

"Then there have been several catalysts used in this inquiry," said Furneaux suavely. "To continue, it was merely a good guess to connect such a process with the horticultural experiments ostensibly carried out by M. Lefèvre at Dorking, so I asked our expert for the names of a few men who might have investigated this abstruse branch of science. He thought there was only one great chemist likely to be interested, a French-speaking Pole named Raoul David, but he, unfortunately, had become almost insane, and could no longer be regarded as a serious analyst. In the library of the Royal Society I found a photograph of Raoul David, and it measured up exactly to the facial characteristics of Jules Lefèvre."

Winter whistled, blowing some smoke across the table.

"Of course," purred Furneaux, "I might have seen David's portrait in many other



haunts of knowledge, but, for reasons which my respected chief appreciates fully, I chose the rooms of the Royal Society. Thenceforth, it was a matter of ten minutes to ascertain that David lived near Russell Square, and I had the good fortune to see him leaving his house. By that time I was disguised, so our colleagues here"—he glanced at the two members of the continental branch—"took up the trail to a restaurant and the theater. The other pair were already on the track of the woman and Moskovitch, who left the house soon after eleven o'clock, and they are now searching the place for documents. I have little doubt we shall soon have full details of the complete organization."

"This probably means a great many arrests," put in Winter.

The speaker glanced at Furneaux, and Linton was certain that the remark was simply a *ballon d'essai* meant for the commissioner, who took it seriously.

"Grab the whole gang!" he said with much gusto.

"The center of interest shifted at once to the cinema theater," went on Furneaux suavely. "Mr. Winter's arrangements were, of course, admirable. We knew our men by this time, and it was planned to arrest them quite unexpectedly when their car was stopped, apparently by accident, some forty yards higher up the narrow street; but fate, in the persons of Blenkey and Jenks, intervened. Blenkey recognized David, while Jenks knew another of the trio as a communist speaker who had foretold last night's explosions, which were probably postponed for a week or longer owing to some disruption of their projects resulting from the Dorking affair. So David and the others realized that they were in a trap, and it is simply a miracle not only that Blenkey was not killed, but that our own ranks did not suffer many casualties. Their car dashed through the crowd, mounted the sidewalk when the block in the roadway was seen, charged the men whose duty it was to stop them, and whirled around into a side street. They began shooting, too, and we have three men hit, but not dangerously. A woman was killed by being run over, and two bystanders were so badly injured that they are detained in the hospital. The car got away, and, of course, has not been parked in the neighborhood of Russell Square. In fact, unless we are willing to see one of the main roads

leading to the west of England strewn with the bodies of policemen, I suggest that our next meeting with M. Raoul David, alias Jules Lefèvre, should take place in a remote part of Exmoor."

"Exmoor!" repeated the commissioner, in sheer astonishment.

"Yes, sir." Now it was Winter who answered. "The home office analyst gave thought to the recent history of M. Raoul David after Mr. Furneaux left him this morning. Being a man of precise habit, he took time to check his theories, and thus, unfortunately, got me on the phone this afternoon at the very moment when I was trying to perfect our arrangements for the arrests outside the cinema theater. I had to decide in an instant whether or not to listen. Rightly or wrongly, I elected to hear what he had to say, because his statement struck me as opening up a clear road through the jungle of uncertainties in which we have been wandering."

He hesitated and glanced at a clock. The time was twenty minutes past five.

"The Great Western people have promised to have a special train in readiness at Paddington at seven o'clock," he explained. "They undertake to set us down at a little wayside station on Exmoor a few minutes after midnight. How long will it take you to pack a bag, Mr. Linton?"

"It is packed already, sir," came the prompt answer.

"Good! We can pick it up on our way. Now I want the members of the staff to listen carefully to the details supplied by the home office man. It is not necessary to take notes. All you need is a general acquaintance with the subject, which may help in individual cases as arrests continue to be made to-night in London. M. David is nominally consulting chemist to a company known as Peat and By-Products Low Temperature Distillers, Limited, which, with a capital of fifty thousand pounds, is properly registered at Somerset House. The process is in active operation on Exmoor, and it is quite probable that not a man regularly employed in the extensive plant there is aware of its real nature, for large quantities of the residual charcoal are shipped from Barnstaple to the manufacturers of steel and iron in South Wales. M. David, the brain behind the enterprise, goes there occasionally. We can only guess at his purpose, but analysis of the mysterious drug now being circulated so largely in this

city and elsewhere makes the guess almost a scientific thesis. A dilute solution of ammonia and carbon dioxide is exposed to sunlight in a thin sheet, so as to present the greatest possible surface. This solution holds a green dye, to permit of complete absorption of the rays of light. Conine and many other substances have been obtained by this means. David has discovered a catalyst which directs the chemical action from conine to cocaine. There is reason to believe that he extracts both the green dye and the catalyst from a particular variety of seaweed found near Mounts Bay, Cornwall, and in the Scilly Isles. As a matter of fact, the Exmoor company purchases large quantities of this weed, which has the property of coloring ammoniacal solutions green, and is in stable combination with a complex organic salt containing both iodine and palladium."

Winter paused for a few seconds, not because he was at a loss for words, but to search for a memorandum. It amused Linton to note the varying expressions on the circle of intent faces. Furneaux's wizened features resembled a carved ivory mask. The others were memorizing strange words. The commissioner was frankly flabbergasted. His natural annoyance at the extraordinary escape of the master criminal that afternoon was now altogether eclipsed by the knowledge that the preparation of a potent and almost deadly drug could be carried on under the very eyes of the authorities, so to speak.

"I am sorry to interrupt," he said, "but can you tell me how long the Peat, *et cetera*, Distillers have been at work?"

"Nearly twelve months," replied Winter, who had now found the paper he wanted. "It is estimated that the Exmoor plant is capable of producing ten tons of ammonium carbonate in crystals daily. This corresponds to the enormous output of five tons of cocaine daily, if one applies that general description to the drug of which we have obtained samples. This is the exact amount needed to effect the moral deterioration of England, allowing two grains *per capita* each day for thirty-five millions of people. The drug is soluble in fats, and could be introduced into many forms of food."

"But—" began Sir Arthur.

"It is being done already, sir," said Winter firmly. "A food preservative containing it is about to be placed on the market,

and the nature of the compound would not have been suspected were it not that the chemical tests of the actual drug and the preservative compound reacted to the same agents. This fact put our analysts on the track. I have here"—he indicated a typed sheet—"a detailed statement of the probable process of manufacture, but time does not permit of discussion to-day. Inspector Sheldon will have other copies made, and these will be available for comparison with memoranda obtained from the Russell Square house or elsewhere."

"I think I would like to go with you to-night," said the commissioner suddenly.

"I hope you will reconsider that, sir," replied Winter, with equal promptitude. "No one in the department can speak with your authority, and decisions of grave importance may be called for repeatedly during the next few hours. It is useless to look to the Home Office in this matter. They do not appreciate either the extent of the danger or its tremendous issues. I myself, this very afternoon, underestimated David's resourcefulness, or he would not have slipped through our fingers. This time there must be no mistake, either here or in Devonshire."

Sir Arthur's mouth twisted in a crooked smile. He knew well why the executive head of the C. I. D. did not want him. During the next twelve hours things might be done on Exmoor of which he could not possibly approve, if present, but of which he could blandly deny the least cognizance.

"Very well," he said. "You will want to send some telegrams in my name, I suppose?"

"Sheldon has the text ready, sir. If you approve, they should be dispatched at once. Of course, I shall be glad to know the nature of any alterations you may deem necessary. One word in conclusion, gentlemen. No one in London or elsewhere outside this room is aware of the circumstances I have set forth so hurriedly. Even my typists do not understand the purport of the memoranda they have prepared, and your knowledge must not go beyond these four walls."

Linton found Furneaux grinning at him. It was as if the little man had said:

"This is where the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring is left out in the cold. And won't you catch it, my lad, when she hears what has happened?"

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

# Homelike Delicatessen

THE STORY OF A BUSINESS TRANSACTION WITH SEVERAL PECULIAR FEATURES

By Ralph E. Mooney

MICHAEL HALE noted with satisfaction that the scrubbing brush had raised a great quantity of dirt. He wiped it up, cocking his head to make sure that he left the edge of the clean area a straight line. When a trickle of water ran into unwashed territory, he sniffed in annoyance.

"Mike!"

This was a woman's voice, complaining and sad, yet domineering. Hale turned with a frown.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Come here," directed the voice. "Come here when I call. Don't stand and yell at me!"

He did not respond immediately, but stood looking around the shop. It was called the Homelike Delicatessen.

"That's a laugh," he muttered, as he moved toward a partition ten or twelve feet to the rear of the counter he had been cleaning. "It's a hell of a place!"

He was not far wrong. The floor of the Homelike Delicatessen was dirty. Angles and corners were made round by accumulations of particularly black filth. The glass show cases were hazy with finger prints. Packages, on shelves along the walls, were covered with brown spots, large and small. A steaming pan, which warmed a tray of hot meats, sent forth a vapor that made breathing hard and raised drops of moisture wherever it touched glass or metal.

Mike went to an opening in the partition and pushed aside a curtain of heavy—also sticky—green plush. He entered a section which was a trifle larger in floor space than the shop proper, but which was divided into a kitchen, a storeroom, a bedroom, and another compartment—perhaps it was a "settin' room," as Mrs. Boyd called it. Such names are arbitrary.

The kitchen, being at the rear on the left side of the building, was dimly lighted through barred windows. The storeroom, forward of it, was not lighted at all. Michael had investigated the storeroom, and had found that it was better so. Light created too much excitement in there.

The bedroom, at the rear on the right side of the building, was faintly lit—on sunny days—while the so-called sitting room, adjoining, gave one the impression that it was filled with fog, even when the electric light was on.

Mrs. Boyd was in the sitting room, with a sore-eyed dog curled up beside her. She had removed her shoes, and was easing her feet upon a chair. A novel lay open upon her lap. She read novels interminably, Michael had observed, but her intellectual pursuits left no mark upon her exterior.

Her face was cross and blank. At the moment, it was dirty. It had been dirty when Michael first came to the place, the day before. Her hair was partly bunched under a pre-war bit of negligee called, we believe, a boudoir cap. It was not wholly contained in this cap, and had not been so the day before. Her body was covered with a black silk shirt waist—two buttons missing—and a woolly black skirt—two hooks missing. All had been missing the day before.

She rolled petulant eyes upon Michael. They were large eyes, with a good deal of animal fire in them.

"Just because we're partners," she said, "is no reason why you shouldn't act like a gentleman. It ain't polite to make a lady holler at you."

"I'm trying to work down through the real estate and see the color of that front counter," returned Michael, with matter-of-fact bluntness.

"The counter's clean enough," answered Mrs. Boyd. "We got other things to worry about. The rent's due to-day."

Michael blinked, and a hint of pallor came into his cheeks. He was a little man, scarcely five feet in height, with curly black hair and a black mustache that covered all of his upper lip. His face and body had a queer way of expressing the thought that dominated him.

"When I bought in here," he answered in a puzzled monotone, "the broker said things like the rent was to come out of the partnership money."

Mrs. Boyd made an impatient gesture.

"I don't care what he said," she snapped. "I'm ten dollars short on the rent, and we got to pay it."

Michael Hale stood blinking at the electric light. His shoulders sagged a little.

"Haven't you got it?" pursued Mrs. Boyd. "You must have ten dollars."

Michael turned his eyes upon her. There was a simple incredulity in them that she found provoking. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Boyd's conscience was uneasy, so that she could be provoked without difficulty.

"Oh, yes," replied Michael. "I've got it. I'll pay it, I guess."

"Well, you better take it down to Mr. Hardesty right away," she warned. Her tone hinted that he had been overlong about the matter. "The balance of it is in that blue envelope on my desk."

Mike said nothing more, but took up the blue envelope and went to the front of the shop. He put on his coat and hat—worn objects, but markedly neat and well brushed—and set his scrub bucket under the counter. He noted that the flame under the steaming pan was too high, and stooped to turn down the gas. As he did so, the shop door opened and a brisk voice called:

"Good afternoon, Hale!"

Michael did not straighten for a moment, but remained crouched, like a boy fearing punishment. A haunted look came on his features.

It was inevitable that he should return the greeting, of course. The visitor approached the counter, clapping his hands together smartly and rubbing them.

"Howdydo, Mr. Donaldson?" Michael acknowledged.

## II

MR. DONALDSON, at first glance, was a striking figure. He gave an airy impres-

sion that he was a man of large finances. His dark gray suit was the sort of suit that middle-aged men of wealth were wearing. His hat matched it. He wore a close-clipped mustache, and was smoking a cigar with careless, free-handed flourishes.

It was only when you met Mr. Donaldson for the second time, as Michael was meeting him, that you noticed discrepancies. Yellow stain was seeping out from inside the neck of his collar and down over the outer slope. His shoes were wrinkled like the skin of an aged negro, and were canted over, so that he stood with ankles bowed. His nails were dirty and overgrown with purple flesh, and there was a trace of oil on his forehead and cheeks.

Having completed the rubbing of his hands, Mr. Donaldson placed them both on the counter and faced Michael Hale, smiling around the tip of his cigar.

"Well!" he said. "You've found everything satisfactory?"

Hale now betrayed the main factor in his make-up. He stood motionless, looking at Donaldson for a considerable time. A light frown came upon his brow and disappeared. An expression of certainty replaced it, and his mustache made one or two movements preparatory to a speech.

Quite obviously, he had wrestled with Donaldson's words, debating their meaning one by one, and had finally decided what to say. Michael Hale was slow-minded. He found his tongue an awkward implement to handle.

"I suppose so," was the answer he achieved.

Donaldson went on at once.

"The inventory was correct? The statement of the business, also? The condition of affairs was what I represented it to be? Quite so! I knew you would find nothing changed. Mrs. Boyd is to be trusted, Hale. I have always found her scrupulously honest. And—well, is Mrs. Boyd here?"

Hale nodded, while he pondered Donaldson's other questions. Donaldson raised his voice.

"Oh, Mrs. Boyd!" he called.

"I'm coming," was the answer from beyond the partition.

There was no hint that she was displeased with Donaldson's ungentlemanly action in shouting to her—no hint that he would have done better to present himself in the sitting room.

"Here I am," the lady announced, en-



tering the shop, patting and smoothing the forward surfaces of her garments.

Mr. Donaldson looked her full in the eye in an expressive way. Mrs. Boyd returned the stare without change of countenance. Although nothing was said, both seemed there and then to come to an agreement on some matter which was important and satisfactory.

Michael, standing apart like a small statue, with black eyes gleaming, was not admitted to membership in the alliance.

"Hale is thoroughly satisfied," averred Donaldson. "I was sure he would be."

Mrs. Boyd nodded. Mr. Donaldson nodded. They eyed Hale so insistently that he nodded, too.

"And that," continued Donaldson, "brings us to the final stage of the transaction. You have merely to pay the balance of fifty dollars, Hale, and the agreement will go into effect."

Hale's absorption of this was so slow that Donaldson became impatient.

"The price of the half interest in the store was to be one hundred dollars cash and twenty-five dollars a week for four weeks. The smaller payments, of course, were to come from your share of the earnings. Do you follow me?"

As Donaldson and Mrs. Boyd nodded again, Hale mechanically nodded with them.

"Now," summed up Donaldson, "at my suggestion, you paid fifty dollars down and reserved the right to pay the balance of the cash required after you had inspected the premises. Therefore, all that is necessary is for you to pay me fifty dollars and take my receipt for it. You will then hold clear title to your partnership."

Hale pushed his hat back on his head and dropped his arms at his side, but made no move to produce fifty dollars.

"Don't you understand?" cried Donaldson. "For goodness' sake, don't you remember our agreement?"

The little man spoke mildly.

"You said the rent was to come out of the store money," he declared.

Donaldson gave Mrs. Boyd a puzzled glance.

"Oh, my Lord!" she complained. "I was ten dollars short this morning, and I asked him to make it up, and he's been yelling like a stuck pig about it!"

Mr. Donaldson uttered a crisp laugh. He appeared to be greatly amused.

"Oh, I see!" he nodded. "A loan—a mere loan, of course. Hale, you're not actually paying that ten dollars on the rent. You are lending it to Mrs. Boyd. Come, now, I will write the receipt form while you are getting the money ready. Then the deal will be settled."

Michael shook his head.

"I don't think," he said, "I don't think I want to pay out any more money just yet."

Mr. Donaldson looked shocked. His expression indicated that he had encountered this sort of rogue before, and knew how to deal with him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hale, but you have made an agreement, and you must stick to it. There is nothing to do but pay the money. You have said that you found everything as represented."

"No," said Michael. "I think I ought to have more time."

Mrs. Boyd uttered a cry of protest. Donaldson became haughty.

"I should be sorry to be compelled to call a policeman, Hale," he said; "but I shall certainly do so if you do not pay. The agreement was explicit. The money is due now."

Donaldson took a step toward the door. Then he waited, in stern silence. Michael flushed, and seemed to lose control of himself. Finally he spoke apologetically.

"Oh, well, I'll pay it," he said.

Donaldson's eyes gleamed and leaped to meet those of Mrs. Boyd.

"Very well," he said.

Moving slowly, like a man benumbed, Hale produced fifty dollars and gave it over. The signing of a receipt took place in a fraction of a second, and Mr. Donaldson straightened himself, sighing heavily.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Boyd, with a sneer, "that he can quit any time he wants to. I don't want him here, if he doesn't want to stay."

Donaldson raised his hand.

"So long as he complies with his agreement, Mrs. Boyd, he may do as he wishes; but I intend to see that he does not evade its terms. Now remember, Hale, this only completes the cash payment. You must be ready to deliver twenty-five dollars a week for four weeks, or your investment here is forfeited. There is to be no temporizing or seeking of delay."

As Michael did not reply, Donaldson was again moved to speak sharply.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied Michael. Donaldson nodded.

"Very well! As I see it, the matter is concluded. I am very glad to have been the intermediary in it. I feel that I have done both of you a service. Mrs. Boyd, by putting your affairs in my hands, you have gained a willing partner. Mr. Hale, you do not seem to appreciate that by coming to me you have been enabled to buy your way into an established business which has infinite possibilities. Good afternoon, Mr. Hale. Good afternoon, Mrs. Boyd."

"Wait a minute!"

Mrs. Boyd interrupted the departing visitor. He returned, greatly amused over his absent-mindedness.

"Of course," he chuckled, "I was carrying off the money. Rather suspicious, eh? Here you are, Mrs. Boyd!"

He counted the bills that Hale had given him, and handed several to Mrs. Boyd. The division was accomplished so quickly that one might have suspected it to be upon a half and half basis, but Hale had no opportunity to make certain of this. Donaldson flipped his share of the money about his forefinger, and drove it into his hip pocket with a lightning motion. Mrs. Boyd snatched at the remaining bills and crumpled them in her palm, while her eyes followed Donaldson's movements with a certain anxiety.

"Good afternoon," repeated the intermediary.

They watched him depart. Mrs. Boyd moved away toward her sitting room, clutching her money and glaring at Michael.

"You better hurry down with that rent," she admonished, as she pushed aside the sticky curtain. "It's three days late now."

Out of sight, she smoothed out the bank notes and smirked at them.

### III

It was late in the afternoon when Michael entered the office of the landlord of the Homelike Delicatessen. Mr. Hardesty was red-faced and large. His hair had not been cut for a matter of six weeks or so. He took the money from Mrs. Boyd's envelope, and looked Michael over coldly.

"I don't see why that woman can't have her rent ready on time," he complained.

Michael nodded penitently.

"She's got the best location in this city," grumbled Hardesty. "Right in the center

of five blocks of apartments, and no competition at all. You tell her this is the last time, hear? If it happens again next month, I'll give her notice to vacate. What she needs is a little hustle—that's all. People have to hustle in this world if they want to get by."

"Yes, sir," said Michael gravely.

"A hustler," grumbled Mr. Hardesty, "could take that store and make it pay two hundred a week. I'll bet she's never done twenty-five clear profit since she's been there!"

Michael set out for the store again. He walked with hanging head, and his pace constantly became slower. At last he stopped and seated himself on a bench in a small park, to think about things. It was necessary for him to do important thinking alone. He could not get clear ideas when others were present.

With his hat removed, and one hand scratching his curly head, he looked like a small boy. There was something boyish, too, in his dejected attitude; but he was not exactly young. Thirty-six years had passed since he came into the world, and twenty-one since he left the orphan asylum that was his first home. He had worked as a laborer and carpenter's apprentice; later, as a camp cook and ship's cook. He had been ten years at sea.

The Metropolitan Business Exchange had been most impressive as he waited in a small inclosure that was marked out by brass rails, with the newspaper advertisement headed "Business Opportunities" in his hand. Half a dozen young men, wearing silk collars and delicately tinted cravats, worked beyond the railing—exchanging business, probably. Three stenographers assisted them. When Donaldson came from a small private office, a subtle executive force emanated from him which seemed to dominate the workers. Cheerfully, Michael had confessed his desire to get into the restaurant business.

"I got some money saved, and I picked up a recipe for a salad in Marseilles that should make a fortune for me over here."

"Of course, of course!" Donaldson had agreed. "I don't doubt it will. Success, Mr. Hale, is merely a question of industry and perseverance. This city is rich in its rewards to capable men."

Not until he had paid half the money for his partnership, sight unseen, did he begin to awaken. It seemed plausible that

he was making the payment before they left the office merely as a matter of convenience to Mr. Donaldson, but Mr. Donaldson's nails, collar, and shoes were less plausible. Also, at a time when Michael happened to be passing through the outer office, one of the supposed clerks had answered a telephone call.

"Kamko Machinery Company," he had stated. "Mr. Reeves talking. Eh? Oh, certainly, old man, I forgot all about it. Well, say—let's see—I'll have it by the 15th, sure. You call me then, will you, and remind me, so I can send you a check?"

"Don't you work for the Metropolitan Business Exchange?" Michael asked, as the telephone receiver was replaced.

Mr. Reeves shook his head with an air of deprecation.

"No, old man, I merely happen to have desk room in here. Donaldson rented me this space until I could get a new line established in the city. I expect to take my own offices soon."

Another telephone bell rang.

"Papo Sanitary Towel Service," announced a voice. "Mr. Bilcox speaking."

Thinking it over on the park bench, Michael wriggled impatiently. Why was he so slow in dealing with people? Why had he been unable to act positively when he perceived the sort of trap into which he was falling?

"I got to make up my mind," he muttered. "I got to make up mind what to do. I only got twelve dollars left."

Daylight faded, and the street lights came on, but still he sat with head bowed, shifting his position now and again. At last, he arose with a weary shake of his head.

"No use!" he sighed. "I'll make it up to-night."

Returning to the Homelike Delicatessen, he was assaulted by a burst of steam from the double boiler and a stuffy odor from Mrs. Boyd's living quarters.

"Who is it?" was shrieked from the sitting room.

"Me," answered Michael.

"Well, for Heaven's sake, why didn't you take till next week? I've had to get up and wait on half a dozen people since you left. What kind of way is that to act?"

Michael did not answer. He merely turned resentful eyes in the direction of Mrs. Boyd as he removed his coat and hat

and sought out his scrubbing utensils. A few more words of berating came from beyond the partition. Michael soaped the brush and set to work upon the counter.

Exercise evidently aided thought, for after a few moments he began talking to himself again.

"She's got my money, and that's as much as she's a right to."

He repeated this several times. Finally, Mrs. Boyd appeared.

"Eight o'clock," she said.

"Yeah?" asked Hale.

"It's time to close."

"Ain't this pretty early?"

"I don't know whether it's early or not, but I can't go to bed while you're here, and I ain't going to sit up any longer. I wouldn't do it for the King of England!"

Michael nodded, and got his hat and coat.

"Well, good night," he said.

#### IV

MICHAEL came wide awake at daybreak, as a sea cook should. After stretching luxuriously and rubbing his eyes, he sat on the edge of his bed, with his chin resting on the palm of his hand.

"Now," he said to himself, "let's see!"

He wriggled desperately many times, but he made some progress. As the light cleared, it revealed him with set teeth and determined eyes.

"'At's the stuff!" he whispered. "'At's the stuff!"

More wriggling.

"Think up things to say, and stand by with them. 'At's the stuff!"

More concentration.

"Now, f'r instance—f'r instance—well, she tells me not to do something, and I say, 'How d'you get that way? I'm your partner.' Then—let's see—she talks about calling an officer. Donaldson put that in her mind. Well, she does, and I say—oh, brother, this is a lulu! I say, 'Well, all right, an officer will just make you give me my money back.' That 'll knock her cold. She'll come near fainting."

He spent an hour or more concocting repartee and elaborating his scheme of action. He kept at it until he had gone all around the situation. Then he went to his washstand and lathered his face for shaving. His mustache was soon reduced to a mirth-provoking islet in a sea of foam, but his eyes were cold and penetrating.

At half past six, he created a disturbance at the entrance of the Homelike Delicatessen. When Mrs. Boyd appeared, wearing a flowered wrapper, he tapped a peremptory signal on the glass of the street door. She opened it a little way.

"What do you want here so early?" she demanded. "You go back where you—"

"Don't we try to catch the breakfast trade?" interrupted Michael, thrusting his chin forward.

"There ain't any."

She attempted to close the door, but found Michael blocking it with his foot.

"How do you know, if you're never up?" he inquired.

Mrs. Boyd gasped. She pushed fiercely on the door.

"What call you got to talk to me that way? Take your foot out o' there and let me close this. You can't get in here till half past eight!"

Michael answered with a lunge which swept her aside. He poked a finger at her dictatorially.

"Keep quiet now," he warned. "I'm partner here, and I guess I got some rights. After this you're going to give me a key, and we're going to open at half past six—get me?"

"You get out of here!" she shrieked. "What if you are my partner? You got no rights to come in outside of hours!"

"Haven't I?" queried Michael.

"No, you haven't. Get out of here!"

"I ain't going," he announced. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll show you, you dirty little bum! I'll soon show you! I'm going to call an officer!"

"I knew you'd say that," triumphed Michael. "All right—go call one, and we'll go to see a judge, and he'll tell you either to give me my rights as a partner or to give me my money back. Either way will suit me. I'd rather have it back, if you ask me."

At this, Mrs. Boyd started hastily toward the partition.

"You wait," she sobbed. "You wait till I get some clothes on. I'll show you what I'll do!"

She disappeared while talking. Michael frowned at his reflection in the show cases.

"Hey!" he called. "Wait a minute! Come back here!"

This was quite effective. Mrs. Boyd came furiously through the partition.

"Have you been drinking?" she demanded. "Yelling at me like—"

Hale seated himself on the counter.

"You listen to me," he said. "I want to tell you something. I'm a business man, I am, and I got business ways. Now, you've told me about being left a widow a couple of years ago. You're just a poor woman, all alone and helpless, that don't know much about business."

"Don't I?" she sneered. "Oh, don't I?"

"No," said Hale, "you don't. How could any woman that's been left alone find out right off all the things we got to know in business?"

She hesitated.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Well," said Hale, "the way I see it, you don't understand what a hard battle it is. You got to be up early and late to do anything. The main thing is, this is a good stand, and there ain't no reason why it won't make us a lot of money, if it's handled right."

"You're crazy!" she rebelled.

"Am I? Well, you just keep out of my way and wait and see."

"Keep out of your way? Keep out of your way? I'd like to see myself! I'm going to do as I please."

Hale dropped down off the counter and shrugged his shoulders.

"No, you're not," he proclaimed; "or I'll call in the law and make you give me my money back."

Again the threat caused a precipitate retreat. Michael set to work in the forward part of the store while Mrs. Boyd shrieked at him from her dressing room at intervals. He paid no attention to her efforts. Before long there came a sound of frizzling grease, which indicated that his partner was getting breakfast.

With a stealthy glance rearward and an accurate gauging of sound, Michael seized a hammer and hurried to a point near the front door.

"Let's see now," he speculated. "She'll try to make me put it down again, but I won't do it. I'll spring the pipe dream the rent man gave me. That'll fix it. Say two hundred dollars to her, and she'll want it so bad she won't know what to do."

Stooping, he inserted the prongs of the hammer under the edge of one of the strips of linoleum that covered the floor. A moment later he had ripped it loose all the way to the counter, and was starting an-



other strip. He made swift progress, and when Mrs. Boyd came hurtling from the rear, called by the sound of destruction, the floor covering lay in dingy billows.

She uttered a scream.

"What are you doing, you lunatic?"

"Why, I'm tearing up this old linoleum," Michael explained. "It's a sight! Honest, it's enough to turn a customer's appetite. After I get through scrubbing in here, we'll have a floor as white as that stone outside. You'll like it."

"You take that hammer and nail that down again. You start right now and fix that—"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted. "Just let me alone, and I'll have this store making two hundred dollars a week. I guess you'd like that, wouldn't you? Of course you would."

Her mouth fell open. She made several attempts to speak, but achieved only a few incoherent sounds. Meanwhile, Michael took up a roll of the discarded floor covering and went past her toward the scrap pile at the back of the building.

## V

MICHAEL had solved the problem of handling Mrs. Boyd. He followed his victory cleverly, tormenting her with visions of two hundred dollars a week and with threats of forcing her to disgorge what she had taken from him. He kept her mind on a dead center.

Meanwhile, he cleaned woodwork with lye and soap. He polished metal. He established reforms in the handling of cash, and installed a peculiar rudimentary system of bookkeeping. He restocked the shelves. He even took over the cooking, after tasting one of Mrs. Boyd's half done roasts—an act which should have been beneath the dignity of a gentleman—and informing her that it was not fit to eat.

On the seventh day of his regency, Mrs. Boyd slipped out through the rear entrance of the store and called Mr. Donaldson on the telephone.

"You come out here right away," she sobbed. "Don't call me in there with him, but come back in the settin' room and talk to me."

A short time afterward, Mr. Donaldson entered the shop and found Michael behind the counter. Donaldson anticipated trouble, and had spent his time *en route* in working up to a proper degree of ferocity.

"Howdydo, Hale?" he gritted.

Michael was not disturbed.

"Hello, Mr. Donaldson!" he answered, with a tone of sarcasm that made his hearer uneasy.

A quick look about the store brought puzzlement. It was impeccable, with a bright and prosperous air that took a deal of wind from one's sails. Donaldson was a petty crook, a business masquerader, and his victims were usually shiftless and unable to conquer conditions. He did most of his bullying in dirty hovels. Cleanliness and seeming prosperity distracted him.

"Well, Hale," he said, almost apologetically, "this is the day, you will remember, when a payment of twenty-five dollars was due. Have you seen to that?"

"You bet!" Hale took up a neat ledger. "Here's the book I've started keeping for us. There's the week's profits, see? Well, instead of dividing them fifty-fifty, I've given her half, plus twenty-five dollars of my share. I've just transferred it to her on the book; and here's the ten dollars I paid on the rent credited to me, see?"

There were surprising figures in the ledger. Donaldson became suddenly affable, but Michael was little moved. He noticed that the business broker licked his lips now and again as he scanned the columns.

"A good showing, Hale!" said Donaldson. "An excellent showing. Now I think I'll just step in and pay my respects to Mrs. Boyd."

"Sure!" said Hale, with a faint sniff.

Donaldson made his way to the sitting room.

"What's your trouble?" he asked curtly.

Mrs. Boyd nodded toward the front of the shop.

"Well, what's the matter with him?"

"Matter?" she whispered viciously.

"Can't you see? He's torn up the whole place. He's sold off all my old stock and bought a lot of expensive new stuff. That ain't all. We ain't ever goin' to get rid of him, the way he's acting. He's going to stay!"

Donaldson smiled.

"What do you want him to quit for? Ain't he doing a good business? Why kill a goose that's laying golden eggs?"

Mrs. Boyd was outraged.

"My Lord!" she gasped. "D'you mean you want me to let him go on the way he is? Why, I haven't a word to say any

more. I'm a nobody in my own store. He treats me like I was dirt; and that ain't all. He's killin' me, he is. He makes me get up at half past six in the morning and stay up till half past nine or ten o'clock at night. D'you expect me to stand for that?"

Donaldson extended his hand and tapped her shoulder.

"Hush! Not so loud! Money is money, ain't it? We don't care how we make it, or who makes it for us."

"But — but — why, listen, I ain't handlin' any of the money. He went and opened a bank account, and he takes everything out of the register and puts it in the bank. The other day I took some I needed, and he would have called an officer if I hadn't give it back."

"Well," argued Donaldson, "what harm in that? He's keeping a book, and I could tell from looking at it that he's keeping it honest. If you think he's knocking down, why, all you got to do is check the cash register against the stuff that's missing from the stock."

"I know, I know," interrupted Mrs. Boyd, her lips quivering. "I know he's honest that way—otherwise, how would we have stung him for that last fifty? But this is liable to go on for years and years!"

Donaldson looked at her thoughtfully.

"Then you really want to get rid of him, when he's liable to make a killing for you?"

"Of course I do. D'you think I want a sap like that bossin' me and not lettin' me call my soul my own? Ain't I human?"

Donaldson licked his lips again.

"Well," he said, "don't you worry. There's a way. Just leave it to me and wait a little while."

"Wait? I can't stand it another minute longer!"

"Yes, you can. Don't act like a fool. There's real money in the wind here. Do you want to throw it away?"

"What do you mean?"

"I ain't telling. You leave this to me and wait. Understand me? Wait, and keep waiting till I tell you to do different. That ought to be easy enough. He seems to be doing all the work, anyhow."

Whereupon Donaldson went away, and Mrs. Boyd, bewildered and hysterical, settled to a course in waiting. She decided that she would not lift a finger to help her odious partner. She kept to her sitting room, devouring novels and nursing hatred. This gave her a certain moral ascendancy

for a time, but it soon became apparent that Michael was more pleased by it than otherwise.

Gnawed by her failure, she turned to Donaldson again, but to no avail. He only gave her rude instructions to "keep her shirt on." He would say nothing more.

Time passed. Michael transferred to her the balance of seventy-five dollars that was due from him, and became a more permanent fixture than ever. She proclaimed that she would stop speaking to him. She told him so frequently. He was putting on airs, she said—all the airs of a real business man, when he was just a low tyrant.

One day, as she dawdled over her book, half clad and disheveled, he entered her sitting room, with his scrub bucket.

"Come in to clean up," he announced curtly.

She got to her feet, struggling to voice her fury.

"You get out of here!" she rasped. "I take care of this room."

"No, you don't, and I ain't going to stand for it any longer. You can smell it clear to the front door. You'll have to take that dog and put him in a box in the back yard. He's an awful thing to have in a shop where people come for food. He looks like some kind of a disease!"

"What do you mean by saying things like that, you dirty little rat?" said Mrs. Boyd, but her voice trembled.

"Don't call me dirty," answered Michael. "I'm not dirty—but you are!"

Mrs. Boyd stared at him. Of a sudden, tears filled her eyes. She tried to turn away with a show of spirit, but her body drooped in spite of her.

"Take the dog out with you," ordered Michael.

She stooped listlessly, and caught up the small animal. Michael glimpsed her face, white and streaked, her lips hanging loose, because her little store of energy was gone. He hurried to the door and stopped her by dropping his hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Say!" he said. "Don't take that what I said hard. I wouldn't have said it if you hadn't abused me. Shucks! Say, listen—what's the reason you've fought me so hard? We could be good partners, if you'd only do your share!"

## VI

Mrs. Boyd crouched in the kitchen for a time, and then returned, dogless and

alone, to a sitting room that smelled of water and soap suds. She dropped into her chair and sat rocking feebly, staring at the wall with a tragic air.

Michael came to the door.

"Now, Mrs. Boyd," he said, "there's that bedroom, too. I can't get to it today, but—"

"Oh, I'll do it," she groaned. "I'll do it myself!"

She began work moaning, but as she made progress she felt better. She took a great deal of helpless rage out on the scrubbing brush and the floor. Now and then she stopped to twist her head over her shoulder and breathe threats.

"You wait till Donaldson and me gets through with you, you damned little dude!"

A dozen times, during the days that followed, she swore she would never give way and do such low work again; but when a week had passed, she found herself listening with dread every time he came near her quarters. Finally, in terror, she set to and cleaned them thoroughly.

As she was wiping up the floor of the bedroom, Michael came to the door and nodded with an appreciative air.

"Nice work!" he commented.

"Damned little dude!" she said under her breath.

"Say!" he went on. "Look here!" He rattled something. "Seventy-five dollars!"

She turned her head quickly and saw him holding out several bills.

"That's your share for this week alone. Think o' that, now! We did a hundred and fifty profit. It ain't two hundred, like I said, but it's getting mighty near it."

Mrs. Boyd sat back on her haunches, open-mouthed.

"Go on—take it," he chuckled. "You got lots more in your account in the bank. You could afford to go out and blow some of it in."

She clutched at the money, and put it in her bosom. He drew a newspaper from his pocket.

"At's what I'm going to do with mine," he added. "Blow it in! Look here—'Special blue serge suits for thirty-seven fifty.' I'm going to grab me a new suit and hat. For once in my life, I'm going to have classy clothes. Say, I'll leave this paper here. It's got a lot of bargains for women, too. Grab a few. You can afford it. The money's walking right in the door every day now."

Thereafter he never failed to give her at least a part of her share of the profits in cash. Her tendency was to hoard the money, but he kept leaving newspapers within her reach, and she couldn't resist them forever. She began going down town and gingerly making purchases.

Then the possession of new things went to her head. She had a buying spree.

One evening she found herself arrayed in a spick and span gingham dress, with white silk stockings and new canvas shoes. An hour or so of self-admiration caused her to make a real attempt to fix her hair; and then it became impossible to remain alone. What was the use of being all dressed up if nobody could see your clothes?

She entered the forward part of the shop.

"Class!" cried Michael. "Now you look like a lady should look. I'm proud to have you come in the store with me!"

Mrs. Boyd flushed darkly.

"Is that so?" she snapped.

Michael grinned, but said nothing more. He was much changed himself by that time. He had acquired the blue serge suit, and a velour hat, as well. He wore the velour hat constantly, and kept three cigars peeping from his vest pocket. That was Michael's idea of the ultimate in prosperity—to have a velour hat and three cigars in his vest pocket.

Things went along smoothly for a short time. Mrs. Boyd took to helping at the counter, and this gave Michael a bit more leisure. He got the materials for his special salad, and began offering samples to every customer. He strolled around town and picked up bargains in equipment. Before long the store was made impressive by a glittering meat cutter and a scale with a sanitary balance tray.

The profits increased a little. Mrs. Boyd purchased a manicure set and a box of face powder.

One day Michael went to the bank, leaving her in charge. He had not been gone a full minute before Donaldson swung in briskly. Mrs. Boyd was disturbed.

"My, what a change!" cried the business broker, looking her over with narrowed eyes.

"Um, hum!" grunted Mrs. Boyd, fidgeting with a loop of wrapping twine.

Donaldson leaned on the counter in a confiding way.

"Well," he said, "the time has come. In a few days you'll be free again. Now

you'll see why we've waited. This business is worth a lot more than it used to be. We can sting the next boob for an even thousand dollars!"

"Oh!" she answered.

"I guess you're ready to lose Hale," urged Donaldson. "He's ridden over you like a man on a horse, and I guess you want to get even. I'll bet you do!"

That woke bitter memories.

"Yes, he did ride over me," she seconded. "He's said things to me I'll never forget—dirty things. I ain't saying he hasn't made good. There's a lot in his favor, but ever since he came here I've had a sort of feeling against him. I don't like him. Yes, I'm ready for him to go!"

Donaldson chuckled and closed one eye.

"Well," he promised, "your time comes now. Within a week, I promise you, you'll have this nice little shop all to yourself. You be here to-night. I'll come in and give him a surprise. Just wait till to-night and see what happens!"

## VII

Mrs. BOYD spent the day wondering what was to happen. She wandered restlessly over the premises, thinking about it. Once she started to the front of the shop, saying:

"I'll go ask Mike about it."

She caught herself up with a gasp of surprise. Had she stopped hating Michael? Of course not!

"What if he has made money?" she reflected. "What should I care about that? He doesn't show me any respect at all. No matter how nice I'm dressed, why, he hardly even looks at me!"

Then she dwelt upon the artful suggestion left by Donaldson.

"All to myself!" she murmured. "Near a hundred and seventy-five a week! All right! Let him go, the damned little dude!"

In the evening she took post behind the counter with Michael. She was careful to be cold and aloof in manner.

As the stream of customers dwindled, she became nervous. Mike put the ledger on the counter, and began to make entries in it. She watched his steady shoulders and deliberate hands with impatience.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't quit workin' sometimes!" she snapped.

Michael grunted.

"Plenty to do!" he said.

She glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to nine.

"Say, why not beat it?" The words leaped from her tongue without bidding. "Why not beat it quick, while the shows are open? You ain't had a night off since you been here."

Michael faced her in surprise; but before he could answer, there came a brisk step, and Donaldson turned into the shop. Mrs. Boyd faltered a little. She made an effort to speak, but had no chance to do so.

Donaldson cleared his throat with a fierce air.

"Well, Hale, I have something to say to you."

Michael put down his pen.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to tell you at once that I've come on an unpleasant errand. I've something to say that you won't want to hear, but there's no use beating about the bush. We have to be cold-blooded in business. So—what I'm here to tell you is that Mrs. Boyd is not satisfied with you as a partner."

Michael did not look her way. So far as she could observe, he merely stared at the plate glass window in front of the shop.

"Under the terms of the agreement," went on Donaldson, "Mrs. Boyd has the privilege of terminating the partnership at any time by refunding you the two hundred dollars you paid for your interest. Mrs. Boyd wants me to notify you that she intends to take advantage of this provision. Within ten days, therefore, you are to make arrangements to leave here. We will pay you the two hundred dollars as soon as you are ready."

Michael flipped the ledger shut and curled his lip.

"I know all about that agreement," he announced, placing the book on a shelf. "One of our customers here is a lawyer, and I showed it to him. He says there's no question about her having the right to buy me out, but he says the price is ridiculous. He says that if you try to make me sell for two hundred, I'm to come to him, and we'll all go to court and bring in witnesses who'll tell how I built this business up, and will show what the real value of my share is."

The little man began to wipe the counter with a moist rag.

"Incidentally," he went on, "when the lawyer heard about how you kept talking to me when I signed the agreement, he said it wasn't worth a darn as a contract, any-



how. So, unless you want to go into court with me, don't come here talking about two hundred dollars. It 'll cost you two thousand to buy me out!"

Donaldson's face turned red.

"Now see here, Hale!" he began. "Now—"

Michael stopped work and eyed him coldly.

"Shut up!"

"But—"

"Shut up!" Michael was putting the rag out of sight below the counter. "I understand you and you understand me. Don't try to throw any more bluff, because I'm tired of listening to you!"

Donaldson was gasping for breath, but he made one more attempt to talk.

"Hale—"

"Shut up, I said!"

The little man walked over and took his coat from a hook on the partition. He put it on slowly.

"I'll give up the partnership any time you're ready to pay the price," he said in a level tone.

He started toward the street door. As he passed Mrs. Boyd, he glanced at her momentarily and turned his head away. His eyes were hot and scornful, as when he rebuked her for slovenliness. The same disgust was in them—the expression that had withered her soul because it rated her little better than an animal.

She uttered a cry and sprang toward him, grasping his arm.

"Wait!" she said. "Wait, Mike!" She took air with a great gulp, her chest heaving. "He's lying! I don't want you to go, Mike! He—he went and talked me into it, and I didn't know what to do. He's a crook—that's all he is!" She paused, then voiced an inspiration. "He got me in his clutches. For years I've been in the clutches of that man. I couldn't get rid of him; but you're right. He can't do this, and I won't let him!"

Michael made a grimace of incredulity and contempt.

"Don't!" she pleaded. "Don't look like that! Please don't! We can go on and be partners, Mike. We can be good partners. We can—"

A sob choked her. Michael began to disengage her fingers. Making inarticulate sounds, she replaced them as rapidly as possible.

Donaldson laughed harshly.

"What a sucker you are, Mrs. Boyd! Are you going to let him walk off with your—"

Then Donaldson stopped, for Michael had suddenly broken free of her, and had removed his coat. He was coming around the end of the counter with a purposeful air.

Donaldson went out of the Homelike Delicatessen.

### THE PRISONER

THERE is a chamber in my house of life,  
A secret room that holds a prisoner—  
A prisoner so bound about with chains  
That he can scarcely stir.

There is a jailer stands without the door,  
To keep him guarded in that secret room  
And gagged, so that he cannot cry aloud,  
Alone there in the gloom.

But should he some day throw off his restraint,  
And burst his way through the well guarded door  
Of that small, secret room, life would be changed—  
Yes, changed forevermore.

I am the jailer who stands at the door,  
To guard him so he may not shout nor stir;  
The secret prison room is my own heart—  
*I fear the prisoner!*

*Roselle Mercier Montgomery*

# Never Go Back to Say Good-By

HOW A POPULAR COLLEGE MAN PUT HIS HEAD INTO THE LION'S MOUTH

By George F. Worts

**B**ENNY DAIBER strode into the library with his hands in his trousers pockets and his gray felt crushed under one elbow.

"Well, I took your advice," he said.

His brother looked up inquiringly from the book he was reading.

"That must have given you a novel sensation," he drawled.

Benny wore a fuzzy tan wool vest under his coat. He swayed slowly forward and back, with his hands spreading out the legs of his trousers. He was a smiling, handsome young man of twenty, with crinkly red hair, which he wore brushed back as sleekly as its crinkliness would permit from a shapely freckled forehead. Benny was a sophomore in the State University, and he was seriously in love. In other words, he was not a torchbearer in the triumphal march of education.

As Jason Daiber stared at the vest, a smile contracted the muscles of his face until his dark eyes were squeezed half shut.

"How did you get it back?"

Benny stopped swaying and looked down at the gold and black jewel pinned on the vest just below his heart. It was incrustured with pearls, and it signified his fealty to an almost holy order. He sighed.

"Virginia and I had a long talk, Jase. It's all off!"

"I hope you two love birds didn't quarrel," the elder said pleasantly.

"She was sore as a pup at first," Benny informed him. "Women are damned hard to explain things to. They always seem to be looking for hidden meanings, don't they?"

"Always," Jason agreed.

"But I convinced her that things just couldn't go on this way. My gosh, a man can't do justice to himself in college if he's got a skirt on the bean all the time!"

"Somehow that has a familiar ring," Jason put in dryly.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking, Jase. If I don't buck up in my work, they'll con me out by June. It isn't fair to keep on making you the goat. And, damn it, I'm missing out all around. I ought to be going out for the team, and I ought to be knocking around with the gang more. I haven't been getting a thing out of college since Virge and I began getting thick. You needn't grin, you big stiff! It was a job putting it across. Gosh, but the woman was peeved!"

"I suppose you employed your usual tact, and handed her all these worthy sentiments without any warning?"

Benny grinned.

"I guess you don't know what a good little fixer I am. Before I left, she saw everything my way. She's an old peach, Jase!"

"Well, I'm glad it's all over, and you can knuckle down to your work. Where are you headed now?"

"Oh, I'm just going to trickle over and say good-by."

Jason sprang up and laid his hands heavily on Benny's shoulders.

"Don't do that, Ben!" he said earnestly. "Never, under any circumstances, go back to say good-by!"

Benny backed indignantly away from the restraining hands.

"I tell you it's all fixed up. After this, we're just going to be good friends."

"Listen, Ben! Listen to a man who has seen this thing happen before. You have withdrawn your head from the lion's mouth. What you're threatening to do now is not only to stick it back in again, but to throw red pepper in the lion's nose. I'm not exaggerating the seriousness of this, Benny. Never—never go back to say good-by to a girl after everything is fixed up."

"You treat me as if I was made of sugar," Benny panted. "I tell you I'm through with her. I'm only going down there now to say good-by—the only decent thing a fellow can do. Don't be such a twirp. I'll be back in twenty minutes. Watch the clock! Time me! I'm going to take the bus."

And Benny stalked indignantly out of the library.

It was a cold, moonlit fall night. Crisp maple leaves crackled under the young man's feet as he walked behind the house to the garage. A gloomy sort of romance was abroad.

Benny drove recklessly across town, and the air on his hot cheeks was deliciously chill. He seldom became angry at his ironic, advice giving brother, but to-night Jason had gone too far—the twirp! Treating him like a sixteen-year-old kid! Never go back to say good-by! Bunk!

## II

VIRGINIA OSWALD abode with her parents in a trim new Dutch Colonial house in Broxter Place. There was no front porch and no doorbell button; only a semicircular brick stoop and a brass door knocker of chaste design, fondly believed by Mrs. Oswald to be more than a hundred years old.

Lights glowed pinkly at all the downstairs windows.

Benny left his brother's roadster at the curb, proceeded briskly up the walk of irregular flagstones with grass rising rurally from the cracks, lifted the knocker, and let it fall.

Presently the door opened. A breath of warm air drifted to his face. Hospitable amber light from the living room formed a halo about Virginia's fluffy light hair. In a pale green dress she looked slender and rather romantic as she stood there staring for a moment into the moonlit night before she recognized him. He could not see her face.

"Oh, it's you," Virginia said coldly. "What do you want?"

"Why—why, I want to see you!" Benny gasped.

"You said you'd seen enough of me."

"Oh, my gosh!" Benny groaned. "I thought you understood. I thought everything was all right."

"So it is."

"But you're sore!"

"Not in the least."

"Well, let me in, then."

"I don't want you to come in. I don't want to talk to you. There is nothing you can possibly say that will interest me in the slightest."

The door began to close. Benny's alarm changed to horror.

"Look here, Virge, I can't go away with things this way! Gosh, anybody would think—"

"Anybody would think," Virginia finished decisively, "that we had seen quite enough of each other. Good night!"

Benny inserted his foot as the door closed.

"Well," he said, desperately casual, "I guess I'll drop in and say hello to your dad. Something I want to ask him."

"My father is not at home."

"Then I'd like to run up and say hello to Lily."

He always called Virginia's mother that. A woman who looked so young, he had once explained to her, simply couldn't be addressed as Mrs. Oswald. Lily liked Benny immensely.

"She isn't here," Virginia's voice came muffled from behind the door. "I am all alone. I am not going to let you in. Kindly remove your foot."

"Say, Virge, you look here—" he began angrily.

She opened the door a few inches and pushed it forcibly against his foot. That was painful. Benny withdrew the foot, and heard the lock snap into place.

He looked at the brass knocker incredulously. He lifted it and brought it smartly down. There was no response. He let it drop again.

"Well!" said Benny thoughtfully. "Well!"

When further adventures with the antique knocker achieved no results other than faint external echoes, he kicked the door.

"Let me in!" he called.

The saxophonic laughter of a fox-trot record pealed forth from within.

Benny showered the door with kicks. He turned away irresolutely, turned back, lifted his fists, and drummed on the solid wooden barrier. He evoked no response.

Presently Virginia changed the record. Benny stalked haughtily toward his brother's roadster, opened the door, turned around, and walked back to the house. He looked in through one of the windows. Virginia had turned off the phonograph, and was reclining in a deep chair before the radio receiver.

A series of yelps and howls reached Benny. He tapped on the window. Virginia did not turn her head.

He walked around to the side of the house and disconnected the lead-in wire from the aerial. He returned smugly to the window. The yelping and howling had ceased. Virginia was determinedly adjusting knobs and dials.

Benny banged on the window, but she would not look. He returned to the door, and assaulted it once more with his oxfords. He went back to the window, and banged on it until Virginia jumped up and sailed out of the room. In a moment an upstairs window flew up. Virginia's fluffy head appeared.

"Virginia!" he began hotly.

"You will hereafter address me as Miss Oswald, Mr. Daiber," she said in a chilly tone. "And you'd better stop banging around this house, or I'll call some one!"

The moonlight made her face look cold, hard, and beautiful—like marble. Here was a Virginia he did not know.

"You'd better let me in," he said wrathfully, "or I'll bang this damned house to pieces! I'm coming in to say good-by to you. I'm—"

"I don't want you to say good-by to me," Virginia interrupted. "I'm going to get my father's revolver, and if you break into this house I'll shoot you as if you were any other housebreaker! Go on home, and let me alone! I should think you'd have some decency, Ben Daiber, trying to frighten a girl all alone in a house, like this!"

"I won't go home until you let me say good-by to you. This is a dirty trick, Virginia Oswald, shutting me out of your house this way, after—after—"

Fury choked him.

Virginia's head withdrew, and the window closed.

Benny looked up at the cold pane, and started grimly for the back of the house. He tried the kitchen door. He tried the side door. Then he systematically tried all the windows on the ground floor, not neglecting the cellar ones. He was barred from the Oswald residence by every device known to modern householders.

When Benny returned to the front of the house after his fruitless exploration, his face was white and sinister. The lights went out downstairs as he glared at them, and a feeble glow went on upstairs in the back.

He hastened to the back of the house, puffing with rage. Here there was a small porch designed to shelter servants, ash cans, and garbage pails. Above the porch was a lighted window. He knew that this aperture furnished southern light during the day for a little spare room, which Lily and Virginia were wont to use for personal dress-making enterprises.

Jamming his hat more tightly over his ears, Benny climbed one of the posts, dragged himself upon the roof of the porch, and crawled on hands and knees to the lighted window.

Virginia was sitting on the couch, with her chin cupped in one hand. Her long lashes swept so close to her cheeks that he could not see her eyes. She was pale, and her mouth was set in a tight line. Her other hand was in her lap, where it comforted a large nickel-plated revolver.

Benny tried to raise the window. It was locked. His fumbling caused Virginia to look up. Terrified, she grasped the revolver and sprang to her feet. Benny sent his right foot through the pane. He inserted one hand, turned the latch, raised the window, and crawled in.

Virginia shrank back, frightened by the look in his eyes. Benny tried to collect himself. The pallor was driven out of his face by an upthrust of crimson.

"After all the years we've played around together!" he cried.

"Breaking windows!" she gasped.

"Locking me out!" Benny snapped.

"Climbing porches!"

"Playing the phonograph when—"

"Kicking our front door to pieces!"

"Slamming it in my face!"

"Making the neighbors wonder what kind of a house this is!"

"I've got just one thing to say to you, Miss Oswald. I'm through with you!"



"You certainly are, Mr. Daiber! Now just climb back out of this room the way you came!"

### III

It was on a Monday night that Virginia ordered Benny out of her house. Approximately thirty-six hours later, the office boy laid a telegram on Jason Daiber's desk. It had been sent from Detroit, and was signed by his married sister, Alice.

They are here—I am holding the fort—come immediately.

That was just like Alice!

Jason caught the first train for Detroit. He reached his sister's apartment late in the afternoon. Alice answered his ring, hastened into the hall, and closed the door.

"Thank God you've come!" she cried.

She was hysterical and white with anxiety. Alice had married, Jason had always thought, too young. Her dramatic moments had been few, and she made the most of them when they appeared. She had been weeping. She was wringing her hands. Her lips were flabby, her eyes pink, and her cheeks stained from crying. Jason wondered how his brother-in-law could stand her.

"Are they married yet?" Jason snapped.

"No, thank God, not yet! You're still in time, Jason. How I've worried! The day I've spent! They're in the living room, Jason. I—I think they're wavering. Oh, I don't know! It's driven me distracted! Talk to them, Jason! Be firm! Think of that child ruining his life, giving up his college career, after mamma practically died begging him, and you sacrificing yourself—"

Jason pushed open the door and entered the living room. Benny and Virginia were sitting close together on Alice's overstuffed sofa. They didn't seem to him to be wavering. They seemed to be very wantonly holding hands, to be snuggling together, as if for mutual comfort and protection. After a day spent with Alice, he did not blame them.

Benny jumped up when his brother came in. He looked tired. He was gaunt and hollow-eyed, and his red hair was not quite so crinkly. He effusively shook Jason's unresponsive hand, and grinned all the while. He was jumpy with nervousness and obviously relieved to see his brother.

Jason looked coldly at Virginia, and in

return for that unfriendly inspection she gave him a shy, appealing glance. Then she dropped her eyes again. She, too, was nervous, hollow-eyed, and wan.

Jason sat down and placed the tips of his fingers together.

"Where's my roadster?"

"It's down at a public garage," Benny explained eagerly. "The—the headlights are—are bashed in."

"Anything else bashed in?"

"No! Oh, no! She's in fine shape. Isn't she, Virginia?"

Virginia nodded.

"Now give an account of yourself," Jason requested. "Try to be chronological. At about eight o'clock on Monday evening you left home to say good-by to Virginia. You were coming back in twenty minutes, if you'll remember."

Benny sat down beside Virginia and leaned forward with a wide grin.

"We—we—we just ran away, Jase. We couldn't stand being apart any longer!"

"Where did you get the money?"

"We—Virginia cashed a check at Bailey's drug store."

Jason looked at Virginia.

"Was it good?"

She nodded mutely.

"I guess we were kind of out of our heads," Benny explained. "We wanted to go some place a long way off. I don't know how to explain it. You probably couldn't understand. We didn't know where we were going, at first. I guess we were kind of delirious. We drove down the State road toward Buffalo. When we got cooled off a little, we decided to go on and catch the day boat for Detroit. We thought we'd better go and see Alice."

"Thank God you did!" interjected Alice fervently.

"Just the other side of Batavia, we were hitting it up about forty, and—a turkey ran out into the road. We hit him, and—and the headlights were bashed in. We couldn't see the road then, and—well, we missed the morning boat for Detroit, so we took the night boat."

"And I've decided," Virginia put in tremulously, "that we won't be married until Benny finishes school."

"Let me get this straight," Jason interrupted. "You drove all Monday night and got into Buffalo Tuesday morning, too late to catch the day boat. What did you do until the night boat sailed?"

"We went to Niagara Falls."

"Proceed!"

"So we took the night boat for Detroit."

"The night boat for Detroit!" Jason murmured.

Benny glared at his brother.

"Look here, Jase, if you're insinuating that—"

"I'm not insinuating anything. Tell me what happened on the night boat."

"Happened!" Benny shouted. "What do you suppose happened? Darn you, anyway, Jase, always twisting— I didn't have any overcoat, and it was as cold as the dickens on Lake Erie. We walked up and down the deck—"

"All night long?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, if you'll let me! We walked to keep warm. The saloon was stuffy, and it smelled of stale food and steam. I want you to understand that I think more of Virginia's little finger—"

"Virginia should be very grateful," Jason said dryly. "Now let's put the pieces together, and see what sort of picture puzzle we have. You drove all Monday night to Buffalo. You missed the Tuesday day boat for Detroit, so you spent the day at Niagara Falls. That night you and Virginia spent walking the deck to keep warm. That lands you in Detroit, doesn't it?"

"We came here the minute the boat docked and we could get the car off," Benny put in sullenly. "We've been up here with sis ever since."

"And how thankful we can be for that!" Alice breathed.

Jason gazed at her thoughtfully.

"Do you believe Benny's story, Alice?"

"Indeed I do!" she cried.

Virginia leaped up from the sofa with her fists clenched at her sides.

"I think you're just terrible, Jason Dai-ber! You needn't ask any more of your insulting questions! I'm not going to marry your brother!"

Benny had risen and placed his arm protectively about her waist.

"Don't mind him," he said huskily.

"You love me, don't you, Virginia?"

"Of course I love you!" Virginia snapped.

"Now look here, Jason!" said Benny defiantly. "We let Alice persuade us not to get married until you talked it over with us. You've got to do some mighty convincing talking, Jase!"

Jason, with his black eyes dreamily on Virginia's white, tense little face, nodded.

"I believe your story, too, Benny. It's a beautiful story, and I'll help you lick any man who insinuates it isn't true; but we are living in such a sordid world, Benny! So, to-morrow, as soon as we have hunted up a minister—"

"Minister!" Alice shrieked. "You're not going to let these babies get married, Jason?"

"Let them?" Jason snorted. "I'm going to supervise it personally, and I'm sure that Virginia's parents will agree with me. As I was saying, to-morrow, as soon as we have tripped down to the minister, we'll all go hunting for a cute little apartment, and another popular college man will enter the automobile industry. You're hoeing your own row now, Benny. College days are past. As I told you the other night, it is dangerous to go back and say good-by!"

### THE MOTOR SHIP

Who comprehends the throb of the strong heart  
 As this ship comprehends it? Ecstasy  
 Profound and lonely given to the sea—  
 A pressure and retreat, a beat and start,  
 A thrust and close of full possessive hold.  
 Proud lover of the sea, both sun and moon  
 Are pebbles in her path; the wild typhoon  
 But stirs the power to meet power. Old  
 The wind and young the ship! It shall not wrench  
 Her from her own. Resistance beautiful,  
 Resistance steady, firm, and deep, shall quench  
 The loud excited hurricane and pull  
 The winds to silence, listening chagrined  
 To this rich throb of pulses disciplined!

Kathryn White Ryan

# The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

XXV

WHEN at last the great Spanish *corrida* drew upon Caracas, it subdued all other interests in the public eye. For weeks in advance it had been bruited in the pages of *Sol y Sombra*. Now leading articles appeared in the graver dailies—the *Diario*, the *Tiempo*, the *Ex-preso*—in which were discussed the art of Juan Leon, the æsthetics of tauromachy, and the relation between Spanish civilization and the bullfight.

The *Tiempo* printed an interview with Juan Leon, in which he discussed the movement in Spain to suppress the bullfight.

"This movement," said the famous *dies-tro*, "marks the beginning of decadence in the Spanish spirit. A bullfight is the most beautiful spectacle that can be imagined—emotion, art, courage, light. The Greek people, the most artistic people of all history, beheld their hero of tragedy die, and were all the more fond of him because he converted grief into artistic material. Formerly we Spanish, too, were like that. A *torero* would die in the ring, and the fight would go on, for we were a strong nation, and, above all, artistic. Now the decadents are seeking to subvert tragedy into sentimentalism, and to drown the courage of a nation in their tears."

*Sol y Sombra* flamed out in color, with photographs of Juan Leon and Angelito draped with the Venezuelan and Spanish flags. The caption read:

Separated by the swords of Bolivar and Montillo; united by the art of Angelito and Juan Leon.

Posters of the coming *corrida* lined every *calle* from Candelaria to Calvario. Brass bands were likely to break into full blare

around any corner, adorned with streamers of the coming fight. At the *biblioteca*, all the back numbers of the Madrid and Barcelona papers were ransacked by students who could speak with authority upon Juan Leon's style.

Bullfighting is the most stylistic of sports. Its fashions vary from season to season. Now it is the suave and courtly style that receives public applause. Then it is a languid and indolent address—a pure affectation, naturally, as if an *espada* would be negligent with a bull charging him! Then there is the acrobatic style, of which Angelito was a master. All this information was rehearsed in preparation for the proper intellectual enjoyment of the coming fight.

Indeed, the tour of a great Spanish *espada* with a herd of fighting bulls through South America is unlike any North American spectacle. It has all the glare and glitter of a circus, all the éclat and wide advertising of a championship pugilistic contest. It is more dangerous than football. It has the stir and color of a horse race, the grace and music of grand opera, and the ineluctable fatality of tragedy.

In a sense, too, it is more sincere and solidly founded than any or all of these. It is the fact that the fatal event in tauromachy is real, and not feigned, that gives it its tremendous hold on human emotions.

It is art, because it does what all art strives to do—it gives a swift and comprehensive epitome of life within a period of time brief enough for the whole drama to be felt without loss of strength or blurring of impression. Indeed, the bullfight is the most perfect presentation of life yet devised by art.

It is a presentation of life itself, and not a mimic show. It encompasses the strong

permutations of fortune, and at the end a real death broods over the arena, either for the *torero* or for the beast. It is sensuous, terrifying, dazzling, and fatal. In the midst of intense color and movement, it forecasts the end. It is pregnant with the austere and beautiful truth that the inevitable and fitting end of life is death, that the feverish round of our days is held in the bosom of eternity.

An increasing anxiety had hung over Socorro Jimenez during the approach of the great *corrida*, but now, since it was here, this feeling gave way to the kind of exultation which a great fête always brings. It was as if the fanfare that greeted the *representación* had such a glowing ornamental superstructure that it made the girl forget the tragic reality which lay at its heart.

On the morning of the *corrida*, the boulevard in front of the Jimenez villa was already bright and vocal with packed street cars, with cabs, and with groups of pedestrians flowing cityward to the Nuevo Circo. A traffic policeman was stationed under the banyan in front of the villa, giving drivers and motorists instructions as to what streets were clear to the destinations they sought.

Through an open window Socorro watched the endless and colorful crowd flow past the iron fence. The vertical bars gave each passing group the design and composition of an oil painting. She might have been looking at some very vivid mural decoration.

The pageantry of the scene brought vividly to her mind the possibility of her future husband becoming a great *diestro* in Spain. The thought aroused in Socorro's heart that vague longing for Spain which sleeps, like a racial nostalgia, in the bosom of every South American. The wife of a great *espada* in Barcelona, or Madrid! What a change from the provincialism of Caracas! Ancient, tawny Spain!

A cab drew up at the gate, and a moment later Margarita Miraflores came running up the walk, shaking her handkerchief at her friend.

"Isn't this a wonderful day? Old Tomas could hardly drive up here. The whole street was coming against us. If any one should fall down in the street, he would be dragged straight into the *circo*!" Margarita hurried in and embraced Socorro rapturously. "What are you going to wear?"

Señora Jimenez entered from the rear, holding an old rose dress in her hands.

"I don't know whether to wear this or my new frock from Paris," she said.

"Oh, that, that, *señora*! We must be brilliant to-day, with a member of our family in the *corrida* itself. You must admit Señor Angel gives us tone!"

"For to-day, at least," added the *señora*, not altogether displeased. "Now, Socorro, do turn around and decide what you are going to wear!"

With a lingering look out of the window, Socorro gave herself up to a consideration of gowns; but what crowds of people were passing the villa! It seemed to her a sort of long drawn out tribute to the skill and bravery of Angelito.

## XXVI

By eleven o'clock all the numberless cafés of Caracas were jammed with diners, eating betimes for the *corrida*. Post card venders moved among the tables, offering the usual obscene Latin pictures for sale, mixed with portraits of the popular fighters, Juan Leon, Angelito, Ercolito. Out in the *calles* the peons were scattering sucked orange rinds and gnawed mango stones all over the cobbles.

A liberal sprinkling of Englishmen and Americans towered above the crowd — oil promoters, mostly, some of whom had come from as far as Maracaibo or Callao on the Coroni to see the all-absorbing spectacle of the season. These big fellows were offering prodigious prices for box seats, all of which had been sold days before.

In old Malestar's wine shop, among the tables reserved for the *cognoscenti*, there went on a myriad-voiced discussion. How did Juan Leon's bulls compare with those of the great Taglione, of the preceding season? *Diantre, señor*, more magnificent than ever! These bulls were unreasonably superb!

The attendance would undoubtedly top all previous records. There were sure to be *mujers* and *muchachas* suffocated in the jam.

An old gentleman suggested that it would be well to get across to the Nuevo Circo while it was possible to cross the streets.

"What is the hour, *señor*?"

"Twelve fifteen, and they tell me that cabs and motors already have to stop two blocks away and the passengers walk in."

The old *aficionados* sat and listened with



thrills to the continual uproar outside. What a *representación* they were about to witness!

The statement that no cab could approach within two blocks of the Nuevo Circo was not quite true. At that very moment a cab containing Rafael and the three ladies of his house had succeeded in getting into the edge of the great plaza fronting the *circo*. Here Angelito stepped out of a shop and met them, in accordance with a prearranged plan. Then, with Angelito in front, Socorro next, the *señora*, Margarita, and Rafael in order, the five threaded their way across to the great façade glaring red in the light of high noon.

The quintet held to each other's arms and moved along with their faces tipped up, as pedestrians do in a dense throng. They were looking at the great entrance ahead of them, and the inscription over it—"Sol y Sombra." Socorro clung to Angelito's arm in the wide noise of the crowd, and read the three words.

"Oh, *carísimo*!" she said. "How I hope that will bring you *sol* and never any *sombra*!"

The bullfighter turned and smiled in her eyes.

"It has been a mother to me, *mi vida*, this place," and he motioned a free hand toward the pile.

The girl knew what Angelito meant, that all his position and wealth—yes, even their own exquisite passion—was a child of this lurid building. Even in the hot press, the girl felt a thrill of profound gratitude that this great building had given her her lover.

How different Angelito was from what she used to fancy when she saw him in the ring! How much more lovable! The glamour of his fighting was now the least of his endearments for her. He was so thoughtful of her, and he awakened in her raptures she had never imagined.

The grim wall of the *circo* had mysteriously bestowed upon Socorro womanhood, love, and a subjective life as keen and brilliant as the spectacles of the arena itself. It had opened to her two queendoms—her own emotions and the world.

One of those little feminine outbursts broke upon her out of her thoughts, and she pressed the back of the bullfighter's hand to her bosom.

"Can you feel your side at all, *alma de mi*?" she asked anxiously.

"Not at all, *carísima*."

They were at the entrance now. Here Angelito must deliver the ladies to Rafael's care and go around to the bulls' gate, in the rear of the *circo*.

As he pressed Socorro's hand in farewell, the girl's face whitened suddenly, and her bosom rose and fell sharply. She lifted her arms about his neck and kissed him passionately, pressing her lips to his in three distinct impulses, as she did when they were alone. Even the *señora* made no remark at this. Indeed, the other three of the party appeared not to see them. As for the crowd, jammed cheek by jowl with them, its component individuals were utterly blind to everything except what was lifted high above them, like the brazen calf of Israel.

Angelito waited at the entrance for Rafael to return and tell him where the family had found their box, so that he could throw them his cloak. When the poet came, he was smiling.

"We are only two boxes removed from the press box," he laughed. "Narciso has just paid us a box call. He said that he was leaving Caracas next week, and wanted to be friends again. I am glad of the reconciliation, Angelito. Montauban is really a good fellow, and, among all of us, I fully believe that he has suffered the most pain."

With the kisses of Socorro Jimenez on his lips, the bullfighter went around the long circular wall of the arena. He passed the ambulance and the horses standing at the bulls' gate, and never once observed them. A little later he stood in the hot sunshine before the gate, knocking for admission.

The *monosabio* who opened the gate wore a shirt of red silk, instead of the usual cotton. This unaccustomed splendor marked the magnificence of the occasion.

Angelito stepped into a small inclosure walled off from the arena. In this hot open space stood a pair of shining black mules, with red harness. These animals tossed and snorted, being rendered uneasy by the faint stench of dried blood that hung in the air.

To the right, the mouth of a dark tunnel sloped downward to the bull pits, where were stabled six of Juan Leon's shipload of Spanish fighting bulls. Next to this tunnel was the door of a dressing room, and, next to this, a door with a cross carved on it. This was the entrance to the chapel, in which the fighters would presently hear a mass before beginning their hazardous games.

Beside the chapel door, in the shade of the overhang, Father Ignacio, in a cassock and a round priest's hat, stood talking to a man a trifle shorter and more compactly built than Angelito. This man wore a well-groomed look of success, which caused Angelito to ticket him automatically as some wealthy amateur whose curiosity had led him to accompany the priest behind the scenes of a bullfight.

Father Ignacio glanced around, saw who had entered, and held out an arm toward Angelito, while he continued to talk to the stranger.

"Come here," invited the priest. "I want to present you, Señor Angelito, to Señor Juan Leon of Barcelona. *Señors*, I cannot express my pleasure at bringing together the foremost artists of Venezuela and Spain!"

Angelito was utterly taken aback to find that this man was the famous Juan Leon. The two *toreros* bowed low.

"Señor Angelito? I have heard of him long before I reached these shores. I am very proud to meet a brother artist whom I have been looking forward to seeing."

Angelito said that he anticipated much pleasure in seeing Señor Leon demonstrate the latest Spanish styles in bullfighting. Pancho said all this in very good Spanish, and he thought that his well worded reply was partly due to Socorro. She had lifted him up to another plane. It was impossible to be thrown with Socorro, to love Socorro, and not become a *caballero* indeed.

With this feeling of having stepped into a new and finer world, Angelito opened the dressing room door, and bowed Juan Leon in before him.

The dressing room was cut up into small compartments, each one tiled in white and furnished with electric lights and a shower bath. Fans kept up a constant droning, and while the atmosphere of the room was extremely damp, the circulating currents of air made it not too uncomfortable.

For the first time in his life Angelito had a feeling of ownership in these appointments. Heretofore he had had an impression that he was a peon interloping in a tiled bath; but this gave way before the fact that he was to marry Socorro Jimenez.

He stepped into his own compartment, where an attendant waited to help him. His green fighting clothes were laid out on one side, and made a pleasant contrast against the white tiled background.

He stripped briskly. As is the way with powerfully developed men, he appeared larger without clothes than with them. He bathed, and his helper began tapping his feet, winding the sticky stuff in and out between the great toe and the next, making a firm, tight plaster around the ball of the foot, and then crisscrossing back to the heel.

As the fellow worked, he talked. The bulls in the pit below were wonderful, he declared. Never had he seen such animals—hair like silk, molded muscles, horns not spreading, like the creole bulls, but sharp and black. He kept praising the beauty of the Spanish bulls as if they had been his sweetheart.

Angelito got to his feet and lifted himself lightly on his toes, trying the set of the tape. It was all right, and the fighter sat down again. The helper picked up the green stockings and slipped them over the somewhat square-molded calves of the *espada's* powerful legs.

Then Angelito drew on his tight-fitting fighting slippers and green velvet knee breeches. About the knees were buckles, and these the helper drew tight with all his strength, under the abiding belief of the *circo* that the more tightly bound a fighter's knees are, the more agile he is.

As Angelito dressed, a droning from the arena filtered into his dressing room. Then the cadence of a band came to the fighter's ears, softened by the walls of his compartment. It sounded like a distant silver voice of exquisite flexibility gliding through the strains of a waltz.

It pricked up Angelito's nerves. For him, the *corrida* had begun.

He hurried on his green silk scarf, adjusting one end to his waist and turning himself slowly and carefully, winding the tough silk around him, fold on fold. He tucked the end in, and then put on a tight green jacket of waist length incrustated with gold embroidery. Then he walked out of his compartment, with a springy feeling in his tightly bound knees and in the unyielding, hooflike tape about his feet.

A moment later Señor Leon joined him. The Spanish *torero* was in black. Angelito had never before seen a black fighting uniform. It struck a note of dignity, almost of austerity.

Out of the other cubicles appeared the *banderilleros* and *monosabios*, the ring attendants, and the mule driver. All were as

colorful as a masque. When the *monosabios* thought their elders were not looking, they flipped at one another with their handkerchiefs. Then the whole procession filed out of the dressing room and went into the chapel.

The chapel of the Nuevo Circo was a little larger than the dressing room, and a little warmer, on account of the candles burning on the altar. On the right side glowed the perpetual little oil light in its ruby bowl. Its tiny red flame burned in the gloom, now a little brighter, now a little dimmer.

The *toreros* stood at prayer, because their bound knees would not permit them to kneel. At the altar, Father Ignacio bowed at the appointed intervals to kiss the book which an altar boy presented to him.

Angelito kept his eyes fixed on an effigy of our Lady of Sorrows. It seemed to him, in the wavering light of the altar candles, that the eyes of the Virgin moved ever so slightly, and that her uplifted hands beckoned ever so faintly, in signal that his prayer for safety in the coming *corrida* was answered.

"Most holy Virgin," murmured the brilliantly clad fighter, "guard me once more in the arena! Protect me from the horns of the bulls, and guide straight my rapier! Preserve me, our most blessed lady, save me—"

His murmuring died away into an unworded emotion of supplication to the small white figure high up on the altar to save him from the perils of the fight. He crossed himself, touching his forehead, lips, and chest with his forefinger, middle finger, and ring finger, and kissing his thumb nail.

## XXVII

WHEN Angelito came out of the chapel, the sensuous swing of the band broke upon his ears, its pulses accented by the ironic chirring of the castanets.

Inside the small inclosure, the procession of the bullfighters fell quickly into line, each man taking his place through long established custom. The *toreros* swung their brilliant cloaks over their shoulders. Juan Leon used a cloak the color of old gold, which made a striking color scheme against the black of his fighting suit.

The *monosabios* made a red and blue cue to the line of fighters, and at the end came the mules with the red harness. An almost

vertical sun beat up out of the ground the stench of blood, where thousands of bulls had been dragged out of the arena. The fighters drew out their perfumed handkerchiefs, and blurred the penetrating odor as best they could. A lad in the rear of the line lifted his snub nose and blurted out:

"*Los pies de mi padre!*"

All the boys and some of the men began laughing.

With a flourish the music in the arena ceased. The fighters straightened their line, sighting ahead of them, and calling sharply for some individual to step in or out. They set back their shoulders, ready to step off.

The band crashed into a military measure. The big double doors in front of them opened. The men swung forward.

An immense cheering broke from the multitude and burst on the incoming procession almost like a continuous physical push. The gala colors in the enormous amphitheater, the glare of the sand, beat down and up into Angelito's eyes.

The noise was composed mainly of the name "Juan Leon!" boomed over and over. Now and then Angelito could distinguish his own name, and occasionally that of Ercolito. He was distinctly second, but he registered in his own mind a vow that when this *corrida* was finished he would be first.

At intervals the music of the band reappeared among the billows of applause, like foam spangling the waves. The fighters began their long march around the great circle. As they went, that part nearest them broke into a frenzy of shrieking, screaming, and whistling, of waving hats, sticks, parasols, and handkerchiefs. It was as if the procession was hot, and made the spectators close to it boil.

A passion to make the most of this unexampled opportunity poured strength through Angelito's body. His heart beat. He moved along swinging his green cloak from side to side. He was self-conscious, from the fact that he meant to be the leading *diestro* of this great day; but even at that his movements did not lose the cat-footed grace of a bullfighter.

Above all, he wanted Socorro to see him. He marched around with his eyes leaping from box to box ahead, trying to find her. She was within two compartments of the press box, but that was hard to locate in the endless repetition of boxes, all in violent agitation.



In the circuit, out of custom, Juan Leon paused in front of the draped stall of the president of the republic. The president was a rather fat old man of military bearing, with decorations across his chest. Juan swung off his yellow cloak and flung it up to the balustrade of the box. The *torero's* sudden change from brilliant yellow to black made the amphitheater gasp.

The president's wife leaned out, caught the cloak, and flung back her handkerchief. The Spaniard bowed low over the filmy bit of lace, and placed it in the brocaded frog of his jacket, making a white spot that relieved his somber costume.

Then the other fighters went about throwing up their cloaks, red, purple, orange. The circling balustrades took on the color of the iris.

Angelito went two boxes beyond the press box, but discovered that Socorro was not there. A trepidation seized the fighter lest he should miss her. Then he saw her leaning over the balustrade and waving at him. He had passed her *palco*, the second on the near side of the press box. He walked back past Señor Montauban, and shot up his cloak to her eager hands.

The preliminary players now spread out over the yellow ring, to receive the bull. The uproar of the amphitheater sank to attention.

From the topmost round of the great bank of seats came the military call of a bugle. It rang out a clear, single voice informed with man's age-long defiance of danger and wounds, and of the inimical powers of nature. It was a dauntless voice. It was the cry of man facing the universe, courageous, self-dependent, and pagan.

When the bugle ceased, the silence became absolute. Angelito stood at the barrier under Socorro's box, looking fixedly at the door of the bull pen. Above it, on the great cinema platform, stood a man with rosettes in his hands. The door beneath him opened, and a bull's head emerged from the black rectangle. The man above lifted his darts and flung them downward with all his might.

A second later the beast leaped into the arena, with the crimson rosettes glowing against his black shoulders. The sheer beauty of the powerful animal sent a thrill of admiration over the *circo*.

Instantly the brightly clad players fell into movement with their capes. The arena became a bewildering maze of color.

Like a black bolt, the bull launched himself at the nearest of his provokers. Other players wove in between the bull and the object of his rush, drawing the beast's charge from one player to another. The great black animal lunged among them in a perpetual curving, tossing rush. The men scattered before him like so many brilliant birds. The fighters ran lightly, waving their red capes, advancing, retreating, leaping aside from the bull with the effortless ease of athletes. It was the most graceful movement of the bullfight, and there came a scattering of applause from the seats.

Angelito stood beside Juan Leon at the barrier. Several times the play brought the bull within a few yards of the indolent *toreros*, but neither of them stirred his position or moved a muscle. They quietly studied the bull as he lunged past.

This passing of the bull close to the undisturbed *toreros* brought increasing gusts of applause from the audience. Juan Leon leaning against the barrier was more admired than the *banderilleros* in full play.

Once or twice Angelito looked around at Socorro, and presently he caught her eyes. Her beautiful face was filled with animation. She seemed to repeat the question of the whole amphitheater:

"What sport in the world is comparable to this? What grace, what light, what gay skirting of peril!"

By concert of the players the bull was drawn to the center of the arena. Then the actors suddenly danced away, and the bull was left pawing sand over its back, ready to lunge instantly at its most conspicuous foe.

This marked the end of what might be called the *scherzo* movement of the sonata of the bullfight.

A man in blue silk, with crimson *banderillas* in his hand, now advanced, holding his red darts toward the animal and wagging them tauntingly. A Venezuelan bull would have required much more provocation than that to be lured into another charge, but the Spanish thoroughbred flung himself instantly, and with amazing velocity, at the *banderillero*.

The man held his two red darts straight up toward the sky, balanced himself on tip-toe, and leaned forward in a slow fall toward the charging bull. With a full arm swing, he brought the keen tips of his darts down into the brute's shoulders at the pre-



cise moment when the animal was apparently plunging its black horns into his unprotected stomach; but with the down stroke of his darts, the *banderillero* swung his body aside, and the upthrust of the sharp horns touched nothing at all.

The great bulk of the bull brushed aside the fighter's outstretched arms, and the animal dashed past with two new crimson torments dangling in his shoulders and whipping back and forth with every lunge. The man was already flying for the barrier, and he leaped inside a small opening just ahead of the bull's horns.

Another *banderillero*, in purple, with yellow darts, approached from another quarter. He went through the same play, lifting his weapons, leaning forward to strike, swerving aside, and dashing for safety. This one could not gain one of the entrances, and he vaulted over the barrier apparently not an inch from the bull's horns. Everybody was shouting and laughing at the close squeak.

From the direction of the cheap "*sol*" seats of the arena came a spearman in blue. The bull turned on him with undiminished fury. Shouts of "*Ole toro!*" "*Brave bull!*" "*Noble bull!*" went up from the amphitheater at the animal's persistent heart.

Quite near Angelito, in a box, two companions, apparently a Venezuelan and an American, were shouting to each other above the applause.

"It's a splendid bull!" cried the Venezuelan to his American guest. "He stands the steel well."

"It's too cruel!" complained the American, who was evidently considering the three pairs of *banderillas* stuck in the bull's shoulders, and the blood that reddened the whole fore part of the animal down past the knees.

"Cruel? *La*, the bull doesn't mind that, *mi amigo*. He is angry. Do you mind a wound when you are angry?"

"But look at him! He is trying to shake the darts out!"

"*Cà*, yes, but in another moment he will forget that pricking!"

The *banderilleros*, who had been playing the bull, now came trotting in from the arena with sweaty faces and heaving breasts. It seemed odd that men in such gay silks should be hot and sweaty. Their bright colors somehow suggested an invincible buoyancy.

At the same moment one of the *monosabios* came running along the aisle between the barrier and the boxes, with a number of rapiers in his arms. The boy hurried out through one of the openings, and offered his blades to Juan Leon. The Spaniard selected one, drew its slender blade from the scabbard, and whipped it in air. Then he glanced courteously at Angelito, as if asking permission, and spread a red silk cape over the rapier, using the blade as a flagstaff.

A burst of renewed applause boiled around the amphitheater at the entry of the famous Juan Leon. This was the beginning of the third and final movement of the bullfight.

The Spaniard advanced through the brilliant sunshine, a solitary black figure with a crimson cape on his rapier, against the infuriated bull. Angelito watched him with the critical eyes of a fellow artist; but there was something so simple and disarming in the great *espada's* approach that he won even the other *torero's* sympathy.

Juan Leon had that peculiar and pervasive possession called personality. That is to say, there was a symbolic quality about the man, so that his adventures became the immediate and singular adventures of every person who beheld him.

The great circular bank of seats sat breathless, gazing fixedly at their *alter ego* as he walked out on the yellow sand against the bull. His courage entered their hearts and became their own. Indeed, for the passing moment he was the object of the throng's great and passionate love, because it was their self-love.

The bull glared at this solitary adversary. The black fighter waved his sword and his crimson cape at the animal. The next moment the thoroughbred flashed at him like a black thunderbolt, and the whole audience was spiritually struggling in the midst of the fight.

The great Spaniard managed his bull with astonishing technique. With dextral and sinistral passes of his silk, he seemed to swing the furious bull to left or right by some magic force of will. The whole amphitheater roared. All the spectators were conquering!

Turning, backing away, evidently at ease yet intensely alert, the great *espada* conducted his raging enemy in a great circle about the arena. He was somehow making the very most possible of the bull.

Suddenly the aristocratic "*sombra*" section of the *circo* realized what Juan Leon was doing. By means of his quiet and finished technique he was subordinating himself in order to exhibit the grace, the speed, the strength, and the monumental lines of the bull.

Came a swift picture of the great black brute charging, horns leveled, head down; now the tremendous upward toss under the whip of red silk; now a front view of the square chest, the lines up the bulging black neck leading to the whipping *banderillas*; then a side view of flying legs and blood-washed shoulders, black against crimson, a repetition of Juan Leon's own costume and the cape he carried; a rear view of lashing tail and immense propelling haunches.

The *diestro* forced from the spectators a sharp admiration, a passionate understanding of the sculptural energy of the brute. He exhibited the prince of fighting in the moment of its greatest fury. The drama passed beyond the bounds of an event in flesh and blood. It breathed an immortal beauty. This charging bull was one with the "*Discobolus*" or the group of "*Laocoon*." With the solidity of a statue it blended the color of a painting and the movement and suspense of drama.

In the midst of this play the bull came to a stand. A typhoon of applause beat in from the amphitheater. The *espada* unwrapped his rapier. Its slender glint looked absurd against so huge a foe; yet with it Juan Leon would bring into the spectacle that which all other artistic forms have either mimicked or eschewed—the passing of life, the infinite suggestiveness of death.

With sword bare, the *espada* walked directly toward the ponderous bull. The animal faced him. Leon lifted the hilt of his rapier level with his eyes, with its tip depressed toward the little vulnerable spot between the brute's shoulders. He stood, a composed black figure with a wisp of steel. He stamped his foot at the slaving animal.

Instantly the red-splotted bulk hurtled toward him. With hilt held high and point down, he leaned forward. From the moment when the tip of the thread of steel touched the crimson shoulders, the bull's horns had perhaps thirty inches to go to rip open the *espada's* body; but the great black head never traversed that space.

The shining steel sank into the bull's

shoulders. The animal slowed swiftly, as if checked by an invisible buffer in the air. It came to a halt. It shifted its powerful legs in an effort to stand. It swayed a little. Its fore knees folded gently on the sand, and then its haunches settled down, as if to sleep. A moment later the animal rolled over dead.

The audience applauded as deliriously as if every particular hand in the amphitheater had held the rapier. Above the tumult sounded the clear triumph of the bugle announcing the death of the bull.

At the south end of the arena the gates were thrown open, and in jingled the black mules, with their gay harness. They trotted across the arena to the dead body, hitched a chain around its horns, and dragged it out, leaving a furrow in the sand.

The band struck up a blithe air. *Mono-sabios* hurried out with spades and buckets to fill up the furrow, to level the bull's tracks, and to scoop up the dung that the animal had dropped in its torments.

Joyousness filled the amphitheater, because every spectator had faced down death with glorious courage. All were heroes in Juan Leon. Out of their enthusiasm, out of their self-love, they flung down coins, jewelry, gold cigarette cases. A rain of valuable gewgaws sprinkled the sand. The throng adored their *alter ego*. They were throwing their largess to themselves.

Angelito turned, and looked eagerly among the fluttering boxes for Socorro. After a moment he saw her, with her face glowing, and still clapping her gloved hands. Presently he caught her eyes. She pointed vehemently at Juan Leon and waved her handkerchief.

When the great Spanish artist came back, with his quick, catlike steps, to rejoin his fellow performer, Angelito seized his hands, then put an arm about him and kissed his cheek. This overture drew more applause.

After this Juan Leon dispatched two more bulls with the same silken technique. The fourth bull was given over to Angelito.

## XXVIII

A FEELING of the importance of his coming fight filled Angelito as he listened to the heraldic bugle and watched the fourth bull make its dramatic entrance into the arena. It was a splendid red animal. As he studied its swift charges in the preliminary *banderilla* play, he could hear the

American and the Venezuelan still conversing in the box behind him.

Presently the simple opening play was finished, and now the *banderilleros* were pinning the bull with short, brightly colored lances, stuck in pairs atop the rolling shoulder muscles.

The thought that he must advertise himself in this momentous fight pressed more and more strongly on Angelito's mind. His heart gradually quickened in anticipation of the coming fray.

There was another cause of excitement in Angelito—his genuine love of the sport. The sight of the satiny bull thrilled him with the delight that a musician takes in a perfect instrument. The thoroughbred bull was perhaps one-third faster than the creole bulls that Angelito had been fighting; but it had one marked factor of safety—it always charged true. It was, as the *circo* was shouting at that moment, "a noble bull."

Creoles were tricky devils. Often they lunged, not at the lure, but at the *torero's* body. This red Spanish bull was a superb creature. On it Angelito would illustrate his skill. He would spread before the world the daring that was in his heart. As he watched the play, he began planning a battle worthy of such a foe. On the tide of this *corrida* he would sail into the *circos* of Spain.

As these ambitious thoughts paraded through his head, he had a peculiar feeling of being observed. He glanced around, and caught the eyes of Socorro Jimenez looking intently at him. Her face was white. She shook her head, and made a negative sign with her forefinger.

Angelito saw that she was terrified for his safety. He thought how little she knew of the glory that was dawning for her! He smiled gloriously at her, entranced by the vision of their future career together.

The *banderilleros* had now finished their overture, and the bull had come to a splotchy stand on the sunshot side of the arena. Three pairs of gay lances hung from its bleeding shoulders.

A *monosabio* named Felipe came running around the barrier with rapiers, and offered them for Angelito's selection. He chose one which he had used oftener than any of the others. It was a fine blade with a yellowed ivory handle. It had been given him by an old amateur on his third bullfight after he had come out of the *Matadero*.

That was a fight up on the Orinoco, at Ciudad Bolivar. When he had finished, an old *novillero* had come up, made a handsome speech, and presented him with this valuable sword.

Angelito still recalled phrases of what the old man had said:

"Invincible courage — immortal fame— Mars of the bullfighting world—"

That had been four years ago. Now he was a principal in one of the greatest *corridos* ever given in Venezuela. The old man's prediction was coming true!

As Angelito chose this weapon, he made a certain gesture to another *monosabio*. The lad turned, and went flying behind the barrier to a door that opened into a store-room under the boxes. Presently he returned, bringing with him an ordinary stout chair.

The whole amphitheater watched intently as the bright green figure approached the bull with the chair in one hand and his cape and sword in the other. The chair piqued the curiosity of the crowd. Such a homely article brought a faint sense of bathos into the drama.

"Milking time!" shouted a voice.

There came a ripple of the laughter of buffoons. It was slight, but it angered Angelito in his wrought up state.

"They will see! They will see!" he thought savagely.

The bull glared at Angelito as he placed the chair on the sand in front of it. The animal seemed to be trying to fathom what new attack and torture this maneuver foreshadowed.

Quite deliberately the *torero* sat in the chair, leaned back, and crossed his legs in the most indolent attitude; but every instant he was taut, ready to whip aside from danger.

Still leaning back, balanced on the hind posts of his chair, the fighter whipped his cape and sword at the bull. Instantly the red monster charged.

There came a blur of action, a sort of massive prestidigitation. The chair flew high in air, but the green figure was seen standing just to one side of the bull's furious follow through.

Angelito thrilled to this intimate grazing of destruction. The animal-scented aura of the bull enveloped him. The brute wheeled. Simultaneously the fighter gauged the distance of the whirling bull and watched the fall of the chair. It fell, turn-



ing over and over. He watched it with the concentration of a juggler. He reached up his free arm, caught and controlled its whirl, brought it down on the sand, and sat in it, so nearly simultaneously that it gave a fantastic impression that the *torero* had never budged from his position, but had dropped out of the air firmly seated in the chair.

Laughter and applause filled the cheap "sol" section of the amphitheater. Its occupants broke into a roar of applause when the great red bull charged a second time, tossed the chair again, and a second time Angelito caught it and instantly resumed his seat. This extraordinary feat was performed in swift succession four or five times, amid the growing uproar of the audience.

"Bravos!" and "Oles!" roared out of the poorer half of the *circo*. Sombreros were flung on the sand. The multitude howled ecstatically at this exhibition of acrobatic skill, while here and there on the "*sombra*" side a few hands clapped. From the aristocratic half came disparaging calls: "Juggler! Acrobat!"

This strange division of the amphitheater into "hot" and "cold" stung Angelito. He was a juggler and an acrobat because his exhibition of muscular skill was treading on the heels of an extraordinary æsthetic spectacle.

The peon in the ring had no sense of this stultifying sequence. A kind of fury to succeed tingled through him. Somehow he was not grasping his immense opportunity. He was losing half—the more consequential half—of the *circo*.

He flung himself more recklessly into his play, and the bull retorted with a fury equal to his own. The huge animal plunged beneath his outstretched arms, and wheeled to charge again. Angelito placed his cape behind his back, and offered his lithe body as a target for the needle horns. The creature lunged; the fighter slued aside. The bull flashed past in a whirl of hot, rank air, and flung up the red silk behind the *torero*. It was the same sort of razor-edged, uncomfortable performance as that of a knife thrower in vaudeville.

The "sol" section, filled with peons, was boiling with applause. This jugglery, this grazing of destruction, was of their very stripe. The daredevil fighter was playing with a Spanish bull exactly as he would toy with a *novillo*!

Such continued one-sided applause loosed a regular fury of recklessness in the athlete. At the next charge of the red beauty, the *torero* whirled, laid a hand on the broad red back among the *banderillas*, and sprinted over the sand by the creature's side. The brute whirled, and tried to reach him. The man whirled with it. Bull and man became involved in a spinning circle—red, with a green center. The whole was a blur, a dizzy gyration.

Even the aristocratic "*sombra*" broke into an uproar at this terrible spinning. A thousand voices broke out:

"Ole! Bravo! Magnifico! What a man! Ole! Bravo! Bravo!"

In the boxes, even the American visitor was lifted to his feet.

"Go it, baby!" he cried. "I'm for yeh, though I don't see how the hell you'll ever get out of there!"

To Angelito, the amphitheater was revolving in a blur of color. Suddenly reversing his straining muscles, he flung himself out of the vortex past the bull's tail. The fighter checked the dizzy swing of his eyes, and stood poised and facing the animal. The din of the spectators shook his ears.

He had meant to kill the animal now, but he was just capturing the aristocrats, and this universal pandemonium spurred him on to a last *tour de force*. He would give an exhibition of daring that would overwhelm the amphitheater.

As the bull charged again, he ran backward toward the "*sombra*" side. He was aware when he passed out of the slanting sunshine into the shadow. He saw the long blue shadow sweep over the furious bull as it came at him head down.

This time Angelito did not lure the bull to one side with his cape. He stood on tip-toe, with one foot a little in advance of the other, as if he meant to sprint at the charging bull.

As the huge red brute hurtled in, Angelito caught an impression of the short red bristles at the base of the horns, the terrific bulge of the red neck, the swinging *banderillas*. Now it was on him. He placed one foot between the bull's horns, and, with the terrific uptoss, he leaped.

The whole amphitheater gasped, and thundered in applause. Angelito's daring had peonized even the critical taste of the "*sombra*." He had bludgeoned it into a crude, primitive worship of rashness and



peril. He had effaced the cool aristocratic universe of ideal beauty. He had won!

With the tremendous heave of the bull's head, Angelito felt himself rise in air, and glimpsed the broad red back of the bull flashing under him. Suddenly, amid the terrific strain, he felt a hot, tearing pain in his side, where Señor Montauban had thrust through his muscles. This exquisite agony destroyed the catlike poise that would have dropped him on his feet again. The yellow sand swung up and struck him a trifle sidewise. His feet tripped, and he fell heavily.

In his pain, Angelito saw the bull whirl and lunge back at him. Beyond the bull came the bright figures of Juan Leon and the *banderilleros* dashing toward him; but the great beast was upon him again.

He tried desperately to roll out of its way. The lowered head and sharp black horns were right over him—the smell of the animal—the whole universe shaking about him, shot through with profound agony. He felt himself lifted. The amphitheater seemed to swing up and down, into the sunshine, into the shadow, the sunshine, the shadow.

The bull had tossed him twice.

The American spectator was getting out of his box with shaking legs and a chalky face. His Venezuelan companion was begging him to stay. The fight would go on. It would not end until this bull and two others had been killed.

A box party of Venezuelans and a gentleman from the press box were also hurriedly leaving the bullfight. They entered a large motor outside, and drove rapidly in the direction of Paraiso.

A little later, an ambulance rattled from behind the gloomy red pile of the *circo*, clanging a bell for the crowd in the plaza to make way. An old peon woman with a sheaf of lottery tickets came stumbling after the clanging vehicle, screaming:

"*Mi hijo! Mi hijo!*"

The crowd in the plaza were poor people who had not enough money to see the fight. They stared after the rattling ambulance and after the old woman, and told one another, with widened eyes, that one of the *toreros* had been killed or wounded.

"God's lightning, and me outside!"

They cursed their ill luck with great bitterness.

Presently a renewed tumult boiled up in

the enormous red bowl. The multitude drew close again, and listened more feverishly than ever as the fight went on.

## XXIX

SEÑORA JIMINEZ insisted, with a masterly massing of argument, that her daughter, Socorro Jimenez, should not accompany the funeral procession to the cemetery. Socorro, she said, was physically unfit for the exertion. There was no need of stressing the fact of her recent engagement. The whole affair had been somewhat veiled; and so, considering everything, it would be best not to go.

Of course, Socorro would remain her six months in mourning—black was very becoming to the girl—and of course poor Narciso could come around occasionally to cheer her up. There could be nothing inappropriate in that, when one considered everything.

In point of fact, the funeral procession was very small, and, as the *señora* afterward pointed out, when she heard her son's description of it, it would never have done for Socorro to be seen in such a crowd; so she had been right, after all.

Services for the dead fighter were held in the church of the Candelaria, and here were gathered a number of peons from the neighborhood of Traposo Calle; but old Ana declined to hire carriages, and no crowd of Venezuelans can walk.

The cortège that went to the cemetery consisted of the hearse, and old Ana and Rafael Jimenez in a cab. Behind them came some little boys, who had found out that the dead man had been a bullfighter. With the fealty of boys to their heroes, they made the long, hot march through the sunshine to the cemetery.

The cemetery in Caracas is a large inclosure, with fine tombs and carefully kept burial plots in the foreground, but, in the manner of all things Venezuelan, its after part is weed-grown and unkempt. The walls around this part of it are thick and high, and are, in reality, long tiers of vaults for the reception of the poverty-stricken dead. In these vaults the bodies of the poor are sealed up for so long a space of time as the family can or will pay the rent. Then the bones are taken out and thrown into a ditch among the weeds at the back of the burial ground.

Old Ana rented a vault for her son, even as she had rented one, years ago, for her

husband. In the mortuary chapel at the entrance of the cemetery the last services were held for the dead bullfighter. In the chapel the body lay in state in a magnificent coffin, but this, too, was only rented for the ceremony. A little later, the corpse was transferred to a very cheap, plain box, and was placed in one of the vaults in the wall.

All this old Ana did neither cynically nor unlovingly, but with the utmost grief and affection for her dead son. It was the custom of peons.

Rafael Jiminez was the only aristocrat at the burial. He stood for a long time watching the old woman as she knelt sobbing among the weeds that skirted the vaults. The hot sunshine fell over the wall, the weeds, and the weeping old woman. The ditch into which all the bones were finally flung exhaled a noisome and penetrating odor, which reminded Rafael of the bull ring.

Toward the front of the cemetery rose the marbled and flowered tombs of the aristocrats. The poet's thoughts flowed on and on in a sad, wistful reverie. The handsome tombs spoke to him of the incurable vanity of his class. It reacted on himself, and shamed his endless making of verses.

This futile, foolish aristocracy had been the one goal of Angelito's life, but into it he had never crossed. However, he had succeeded in one thing. Rafael knew that his sister would never cease to love the man whom they were laying to rest to-day in this cheap vault of the poor. The only power that could ever have shaken Socorro's passion for the bullfighter was Angelito himself, and now his voice was stilled.

He knew that in time to come Socorro would marry Narciso Montauban, as he himself would eventually marry Margarita Miraflores. *Pues*, it was all very well!

The woman whom he had so long and so barrenly desired, that exquisite, understanding, and passionate woman whom the fancy of his adolescence had painted—she either could not be found or did not exist at all; but his sister Socorro had known a man who had moved her to the very foundation of her being. A glimpse had been vouchsafed her. Evanescent it was, and perhaps its continuance would have been impossible; but for her one short day, at least, she had lived.

In his heart Rafael was glad of that. He was thankful that this one little crumb of immortality had dropped into his sister's lap from the banquet of the indifferent gods.

THE END

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### COMPENSATION

PRAYERS that were never said,

Vows that were never spoken—

These might have comforted

A heart long broken.

The song we did not sing,

The wish we never cherished—

Unborn, how may these bring

Peace, when dreams have perished?

That way we never went,

That sunrise, lost through sleeping—

Is there a far event

Where beauty shall come creeping,

To give us all we lost

And all she might have given?

Oh, piteous were the cost

If that should not be heaven!

Charles Hanson Towne